

# **Identity and Inclusion**

**Edited by  
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**The Editor**



## IDENTITY AND INCLUSION

**Mrigendra Bahadur Karki**

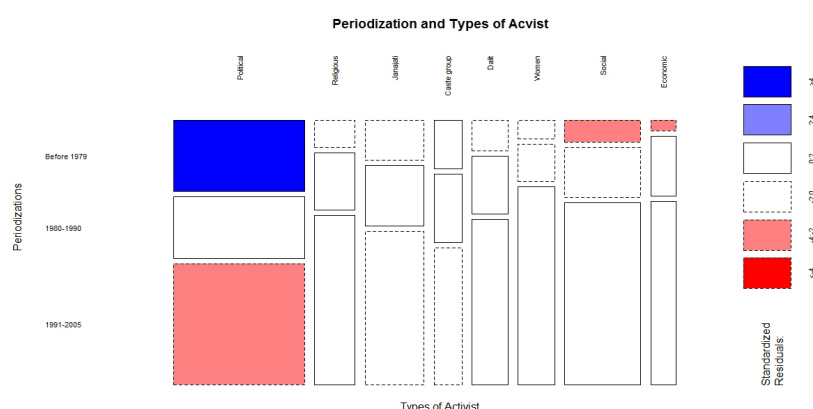
Identity has emerged as a powerful theory to organise people in Nepal. Similarly, it has been envisioned as a vehicle of collective emancipation from discrimination, marginalization and social exclusion since 1990s. Erik H. Erikson, a psychoanalyst, coined the term 'identity' during the late 1940s in the social and psychological circumstances of World Wars, however, by the 1980s it became a stock term in sociology a widespread social label (Weigert, Teitge and Teitge 1986). Stryker (1980) initiated a sociological approach to self and identity with the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self and society. These two nodes – identity and society – influence each other for example individual self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organizations, networks, and institutions. And, equally, society employing a political process influences the individual self employing shared stories, common histories, cultures, shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the management of identity is, really, a complicated task in a democracy (Guttmann 2003). Ethnic identities, sometimes, transform into mechanism 'opportunity hoarding' (Tilly 2005:170).

Identity is not time and meaning neutral notion. Identity, as it has developed or conceptualised at this point in Nepal, reified through transactions of various social, cultural and psychological differences. Unlike today, until the early 1980s boundaries within people used to shaping under various local differences for example the Kham Magars of Rolpa used to generate the differences in local context

... on the dialects of different villages, their specific festival calendars, their different ways of covering haystacks (by means of a cover made of goatskin or with a straw roof), the different itineraries they followed with their flocks, or the boundaries of their communal territories. Subjects like these were discussed again and again. Such conversations presupposed a common shared identity, of course, but there was no context in which Kham Magars needed to articulate it (de Sales 2000:41).

These differences gradually transformed into a political identity through a social and a political process particularly since the 1990s (See Karki 2011 and 2012a).<sup>2</sup> The process itself is a reference node for the formation and counter formation of grievances, respect, dignity, opportunity structure, and perceptions where an individual and community cross-cut with own image, space and identity. Since the 1980s Nepal enjoyed the framing process of involuntary collective identity that was a result of rural-urban migration,

referendum of 1979 and student movements (See Karki 2011). The referendum which I term 'locus of public interaction' to produce new agency in Nepal. The agency produced various ethnic organizations (See Gellner and Karki 2008 and Karki 2010) as following mosaic plots expresses.



The 1990s multiparty liberal democracy legitimized these collective identity movements, and these identity groups started to resistance against the dominant group and the state. Subsequently, various currents of activism and movement gained a significant advancement including the ‘recognition’ (self, social, and political) of traditional subordinate groups including Dalit, women, indigenous nationalities, and formation of other organizations. Consequently, political parties became compelled to endorse the new identities formally in their agenda and introduce new departments (ethnic, Dalit, social issues) in the structure of their organization. Now, all political parties have set up these departments as part of their integral wings.<sup>3</sup> Gradually, these collective identity movements started project-oriented programmes for social and political transformation.<sup>4</sup> Exploration of representative democracy through the method of social inclusion is a present political process of Nepal.

Political movement, the ethnic, Dalit, and regional movements were supposed as communal activism. For example, accusations of being *Bagiyan*, *Gath-gaddi Taakne*, *Rajdrohi*, *Rastradrohi*, *Adhaharmi*, *Arastriya Tattwa*, *Gobar*, *Kharani*, *Kulakshin*, *Sampradayik*, and *Kshetribyadi* could be tagged on any oppositional activist in different political regimes. It is interesting to note that the same political activists are now in their party’s front organizations and central committees, however, they acted hesitant to reveal the continuation of their involvement in and commitment to

independent social and ethnic concerns. The parties' new departments paved gateway to develop intra-party networks that promoted the mobilization and advancement of identity activism.

Activists discovered the notion of identity other than political banner. The political activists in the period of 1991-2005 found the negative weak association. After 1990, Nepali constitutions opened up opportunities for all forms of activism. The suppressed voices came out individually and collectively, especially in organizational form (See Gellner and Karki 2008). The Maoist insurgency brought up the identity issue into the core of polity. The rise of cultural nationalism, regionalism, Dalit, and women appeared as powerful forces in the public sphere. Weigert, Teitge and Teitge (1986) argue that 'by the 1980s, the identity had become a stock technical term in sociology and a widespread social label. However, until 1940, it was unknown.' It is also true that in Nepal identity groups appeared at the same period through conflict based experiences with the state despite non political agenda of identity; for example ritual, ethnic and language. However, for its ownership democracy provided a vital role.

A reciprocal axis, this issue, has been observed between undercurrent social movements (SMs) and on the emergence of identity politics in Nepal. SMs spawn identity politics and the identity politics generates SMs or vice versa. The main argument generated from the mosaic plot as explanatory tools for these findings. I have employed a blending approach of 800 survey data and a dozen in-depth interviews collected in 2003-5, and archival sources as well following two sociological variables – time and types (See Karki 2010, 2012a and 2012b). However through the motivational factors the mosaic plot has attempted to explain Nepali social structure. It compares eight types of Nepali activist – political, religious, ethnic, caste, Dalit, women, social, and economic – and across the three political structures – high authoritarian, authoritarian and democratic.

### **Multiple meaning of social inclusion**

The regional centers' interactions, even though social inclusion is a political agenda (See Gurung 2006) exemplify different social groups these embody various meanings and process of inclusion. The discussion shows that a social organization forms through an accumulation of numerous social transactions. The meaning of social inclusion is plural. The interactions exemplify that embedded visible and invisible forms of motivation play a crucial role in defining the meaning of inclusion whether its nature is either

structural homophily – similarity breed connection – or heterogeneous transaction, network ties or interventions.

For indigenous nationalities inclusion begin from de-Sankritization or identity assertion and equal power sharing in the state and social structures horizontally of all collectivities:

In fact, Prithbi Narayan Shah, in the name of (nation) unification or mono-isation (*Ekatmakaran*), had signed a treaty with Khambus and Limbus even before that here these peoples were enjoying Khamuwan and Limbuwan autonomous region.

Padam Chemjong

For indigenous nationalities, the inclusion can be achieved through the mechanism of single identity federalism.

Contrary to this, process and mechanism for Dalits' inclusion is an identity aversion. Dalis gave up their "Dalit identity" to explore "new identity" or fusion on so called high caste surname for example in 2001 census Kamis population has decreased by 67,107 compared to 1991 census. It is not a new discovery (See Gurung 2007) however new research, at least in the public notice, has not been carried out in this theme to deal with this very complex phenomena.

It is obvious to decrease the Dalits' population because Dalits are still compelled to live like an animal. Despite the fact that King Mahendra had declared Nepal as the state free of Discrimination on the basis of untouchability, this has yet to be implemented. Dalit still have to hide their identity in order to set in a society because if they do not adapt Braham or different (unique) surname they will not be able to adjust in the society. They are still boycott for being the Dalit. For example recently I went to Kathmandu and I came to know that lots of Dalits are living with new or hidden surname. So during a census these Dalits data are enumerated under a different surname as they have adapted.

Nara Maya Pariyar

### **Special issue**

The journal has included six papers. The contributors have critically analysed the policy of the government, issues and dimensions of exclusion and inclusion itself. Of the five papers, Dilli Ram Dahal has analysed the situation of Yadav of Central tarai region in his paper Social Exclusion/Inclusion Among The Madhesi: A Case Study Of Yadavs of



Central Nepal Tarai. Even though, the government of Nepal has identified Madhesi people are excluded, which is partially true as Dahal claims analysing the empirical data. In his finding, the state's decision is not rational. On the other hand, Tej Man Angdembe argues for the monolingual policy of minority languages to save the endangered languages through an article Saving Endangered Languages Via Unnatural Selection Utility Theory.

Madhu Giri has found that identity activism and political involvement are key emerging ways of inclusion in the changing Nepali context. He refutes the theory of James Scott (1985) theory of 'off stage performance' to resist against marginalization employing Mushahars cases. On the other hand Sadixya Bista discusses the exclusion of LGBTI within private and public places. Mahesh Maharjan discusses the Newar Dalits' contemporary identity activism and resistance against the high caste Newars to get equal status within their social and cultural structure. Sanju Nepali discusses among the boys/male and girls/females in relation to social and familial discrimination.

### Notes

1. Tilly (2005:209) proposed four components of the identity formation: i) a boundary separating 'me' from 'you' or 'us' from 'them', ii) a set of relations within the boundary, iii) a set of relations across the boundary, and iv) a set of stories about the boundary and the relations. Identity can be formed from three ways a) superimposed intellectual category, b) an automatic result of grievances, and c) in the confluence of these two.<sup>1</sup> We can find out identity from three identified social movements from two perspectives a) superimposed intellectual category, and b) an automatic result of grievances.
2. The paper proposes collective identity in terms of current political conception.
3. This section of the paper has taken from Karki (2012a).
4. I borrowed three concepts – legitimacy, resistance-oriented, and project-oriented from Castells (1997).

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# **SOCIAL EXCLUSION/INCLUSION AMONG THE MADHESIS: A CASE STUDY OF YADAVS OF CENTRAL NEPAL TARAI**

**Dilli Ram Dahal**

## **Abstract**

*In Nepal various forms of exclusion and discrimination are recognized among various groups of people. Regional exclusion is considered another distinct feature of exclusion in Nepal. In government documents and various articles and books it is clearly mentioned that "Madhesi" groups of Nepal Tarai are "excluded" without understanding the social structure and socioeconomic and political dimensions of various groups of people labeled within the larger Madhesi category. Bringing the case of Yadavs, one of the Madhesi groups from Dhanusa district of Central Nepal Tarai, this paper examines the process of inclusion/exclusion among Yadavs in relation to other groups living in the district.*

*Using the proportionate to population size (PPS) method, a total sample of 591 households were drawn out of which 408 were Yadav households and the rest 183 households were from other groups /communities. In addition to the household survey, qualitative data were also collected to complement the household level data on social inclusion/exclusion.*

*The paper demonstrates that Yadavs of the Central Nepal Tarai are better off in political and economic situations compared to other communities of the area and are the key players in local bodies and national politics. In other words, excluding some social issues at the household and the community level, Yadavs are not at all excluded group in the given economic and political indicators of the society, Dhanusa district and Nepal as a whole. So a broad generalization that the "Madhesi people" are excluded groups is only partially true.*

## **Introduction**

One of the most neglected areas of social science research in Nepal is the Tarai, a strip of tropical flat land, occupying 20 districts, where 50.15 percent of the total population of Nepal lives today (CBS 2011). By ethnic/caste groups, Tarai

encompasses the diverse cultural groups ranging from the hill origin ( the Hill-origin caste groups, Adibasi/Janajati and Dalits ) to the Tarai- origin peoples or Madhesi ( caste origin groups including Tarai Dalits , Adibasi/Janajati groups and others. It is hard to give a precise and unambiguous definition of the Madhesi people (Dahal 2002, 2005) living in the Tarai today. The share of the hill people, which was close to 33 percent of the total population of the Tarai in the 1991 Census, has increased to more than 36 per cent in the 2001 Census. Among the various Madhesi groups, the Central Bureau of Statistics listed only 60 ethnic/caste groups in the 2001 Census (see Annex 1 population size of Madhesi groups, excluding the Hill origin people). The “Other Backward Caste” Sammittee lists 24 Madhesi groups in addition to high caste Hindu Madhesi and Dalits (OBC Bulletin 2007) in the Tarai. In brief, the Tarai today presents a distinct multi-cultural region or the “melting pot” in terms of settlement of various groups of people.

The detailed ethnographic studies of the Madhesi groups of the Tarai are limited. Burgahrt (1978) as a part of his PhD dissertation discussed at great length about the Maithili culture and civilization of Dhanusa district. In exploring the sacred complex of Janakpur, Jha (1971) systematically explored the various divinities of Janakpur area with focus on the Great Hindu tradition and civilization. Jha (1993) has discussed at great length the problems and issues of Tarai people, showing serious concerns in the process of national integration. Acharya (1981) has added a volume to Maithili culture of the Eastern Tarai, focusing on the social, cultural and economic conditions of the Maithili women of the area. Burkitt (1997) has attempted to equate the term Madhesi with Maithili culture and nationalism as propagated by the high caste Madhesi groups. Hachhethu (2008) discusses at length the local democracy and political parties in Dhanusa district, and examines how various Madhesi groups are participating in the larger democratic processes. Guneratne (2002) discusses the shared symbols and meaning as the ethnic identity among the Tharus in general and Chitwan district in particular. For the first time Gaige (1975) introduced the concept of regionalism and argues that there is a wide gap of understanding between the peoples of the Hills and Tarai which could pose a threat of national integration in Nepal.

The other serious concern is socioeconomic condition of the Madhesi people in general. Despite the closeness of Tarai to India in all its corners with basic

market and infrastructure facilities, the socioeconomic status of many of the Madhesi groups living in this region is quite low. ICIMOD(2003) study of district development indicators (such as the overall composite index, women empowerment index and child deprivation index) suggest that those Tarai districts with a higher percentage of Madhesi population (districts such as Dhanusa, Saptari, Parsa, Kapilbastu, Bara, Siraha, Sarlahi, Mahottari and Rautahat) lag behind those Tarai districts that have a higher percentage of Hill people (districts such as Chitwan, Jhapa, Morang, Rupandehi and Sunsari).

There is little cultural analysis about the Madhesi people how this has happened to them over a period of time. Nevertheless serious debates among scholars are going on about the Madhesi people that they are exploited by the hill rulers throughout history and because of this there is a discrimination by the state against the Madhesi people in every front of life (Gupta 2006, Jha 1993, Dahal 1983, 2008). Again, social exclusion of people is considered the major determinant of leading underdevelopment of various groups of in Nepal including the people of Tarai region (CBS/ World Bank/DFID 2006, World Bank/DFID 2006, Bennett 2002; Lawati 2005, and Bhattachan 1995 ). But one of the major problems in doing research on social inclusion/exclusion in Nepal is not only the meaning and interpretation of the term but also the pointing out who are really the included/excluded groups in reference to other groups in Nepal. The other major concern is the value loaded western concepts and definitions on social inclusion/exclusion in which most of our indexes on social exclusion are being developed in recent years (CBS/World Bank/DFID 2006; World Bank/DFID 2006). There is little disaggregated socioeconomic data on various groups of people of Nepal even today. In brief, little is known about the people of the Tarai even today, particularly the “Madhesi people, with reference to their origin, history, culture, socioeconomic conditions and the processes of inclusion/exclusion among them.

My argument in this paper is that a broad generalization about the Madhesi people that they are the excluded groups is only partially true. Up to today, most of the information on the Madhesi people is based on the macro level generalization and vertical explanation, without understanding the complexity and diversity of socioeconomic status of people among them. Little disaggregated socioeconomic and political information on these various ethnic/caste groups is available for detailed analysis. Because of this, it is difficult to identify clearly

who are really the socially excluded groups of people or the level of inclusion/exclusion among these various groups of people in the Tarai in Nepal in general and Madhesi groups in particular. In Madhesi groups, there is a clear hierarchy in social structure among them and the socioeconomic condition of various groups of people differ from one group to another.

Within the larger “Madhesi” category, there are 43 Hindu origin caste groups, 10 Adibasi/Janajati groups and one Muslim (Dahal 2003). The Hindu caste groups of the Tarai are highly stratified society in socioeconomic terms. There are some groups (such as Maithil Brahmin, Rajput, Kayatha, Bhumihaar and Yadav) whose socioeconomic status is better compared to so called even high caste hill Brahmin and Chhetry groups of Nepal (Dahal and Acharya 2008). The other economically powerful groups in the Hindu Madhesi group are the Teli (Saha), Sudi and Kalwar, who are better educated (more engineers and medical doctors) and the major money lending groups in the Tarai. Within them, there are many Adibasi/Janajati and Tarai Dalit groups who are much behind socio-economically compared to other Hindu Madhesi groups of the Tarai. So, a broad label of “Madhesi” category alone would hardly justify the process of social inclusion/exclusion in the context of Nepal Tarai in general and Madhesi groups in particular.

Bringing the case of Yadavs of Dhanusa District of Central Nepal Tarai, the paper examines the process of inclusion/exclusion of Yadavs in relation to other groups. This paper assesses the socioeconomic and political situations of Yadavs of Dhanusa district and compares their socioeconomic attributes with similar other cultural groups of the area vis-à-vis Dhanusa district and elsewhere. The paper argues that regional or political exclusion is not the sole factors analyzing the mechanisms of exclusion of the group of people in question. The socio-cultural factors equally play dominant roles excluding a group of people in the same community.

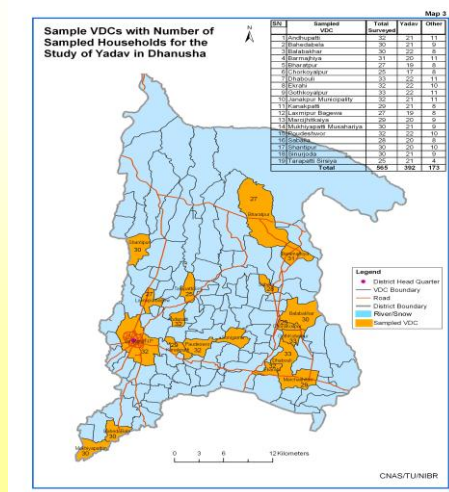
The data for this research paper were derived from the larger research project on “Social Exclusion and Group Mobilization”, a research project jointly carried out by CNAS/TU and NIBR Norway between the years 2006-2009. Dhanusa district was selected for detailed research to meet the goals of research, particularly Yadavs and other similar cultural groups were considered to understand the process of inclusion/exclusion. Within Dhanusa district, 591 households were selected in 19 VDCs and one municipality using the



Proportionate to Population Size (PPS) method (see Map 1). Field work was carried out from November 2007 to February 2008 to collect both the quantitative (household survey) and qualitative data (case studies, etc).

**Map 1:**

## Sample Clusters: Yadavs



The caste/ethnicity of sample respondent households is given in Table 1.

**Table1: Caste/Ethnicity of Sample Households (Yadavs Vs All Others)**

| Caste/Ethnicity         | Number of Respondents(Yadavs and All Others) with per cent |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yadavs                  | 408(69.0)                                                  |
| TaraiDalits             | 48(8.1)                                                    |
| Other Tarai caste group | 92(15.6)                                                   |
| TaraiJanajati           | 2(0.3)                                                     |
| Muslims                 | 10(1.7)                                                    |

|                     |            |
|---------------------|------------|
| Newar               | 3(0.5)     |
| Other Hill Janajati | 18(3.0)    |
| Others              | 10(1.7)    |
| Total               | 591(100.0) |

*Source: Field Survey, 2008.*

By caste/ethnicity, the Yadav respondents constitute 69.0 per cent or 408 households, followed by "All others" cultural groups such as the Tarai caste (15.6%), Tarai Dalits (8.1%), Muslims (1.7%) Tarai Janajati (0.3 %) and Newar and other Hill Janajati (3.5%) . In total, the larger Madhesi cultural groups represent 96.5% of the total sample respondent households. Among the hill Janajati groups, there are mostly Tamangs, Magars and Newars in the study area. The migration and settlement history of these hill groups is over the last two to three generations in the sample VDCs and municipality of Dhanusa district. Demographic characteristics of sampled households are given Table 2.

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of sampled Households of Yadavs and All Others**

| Caste /Ethnicity       | Male       | Female     | Total Pop. | Total HH  | Average H. Size | Sex Ratio |
|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| Yadavs                 | 1446       | 1249       | 2695       | 408       | 6.6             | 115.0     |
| All Others             | 639        | 558        | 1197       | 183       | 6.5             | 114.0     |
| Dhanusa District, 2001 | 349,422    | 321,942    | 671,364    | 117,417   | 5.7             | 108.5     |
| Nepal(2001)            | 11,563,921 | 11,587,502 | 23,151,423 | 4,253,220 | 5.4             | 99.8      |

*Source: Field Survey, 2008.*

Both the average household size and sex ratio are very high among Yadavs and "all others" compared to Nepal and Dhanusa district as a whole. The high average household size among Yadavs and all others suggests two things: a) More and more family members prefer to live in an extended family system (father, mother, unmarried daughters and married sons are living together), and b) Fertility rate is high among these groups. Considering the fact that male members are more mobile in searching for jobs elsewhere and females are sedentary in nature among

the Madhesi cultural groups, the sex ratio should be just the opposite( Table 2). This unusual sex ratio could be due to two factors: a) Un-reporting or misreporting of female births among the Madhesi groups, b) It is likely there is a high rate of female abortion among the Madhesi groups because of the low status of female in the given society.

### **Yadavs of Central Nepal Tarai**

The most numerous and dominant among the Hindu caste Madhesi groups are the Yadavs (895,423 people, that is, 4.1 per cent of the total population of Nepal and 7.9 per cent of the Tarai population)(2001 Census). They are numerically the highest in the following five district of the Tarai: Siraha and Saptari (Eastern Tarai) and Dhanusa, Mahottari and Sarlahi (Central Tarai). In Dhanusa district, Yadavs are the single largest group, 117,938 or 17.6% of the total population. More than 99% of the Yadav populations are Hindus. They speak Maithili language and Nepali is their second language. Yadavs are popularly known as Ahir, Gwala or Gwar (milkman) or simply Yadav. According to the old informants, they are the descendant of Lord Krishna or Gopala (the cow herder) who was considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In the social stratification of various Hindu groups of the Tarai which is a highly stratified society, Yadavs place themselves in the middle of Hindu caste category (Dahal 2005; Bista 1967; Gaige 1975). They marry within their caste groups and inter-caste marriage is rare among them. They have many subgroups within them such as Manjharaut, Krishnanaut, Sethbar, and Bisnaut, Bharkehr (Raya, Goit, Marabita, Gurmaita, Kusiyat and Biraji, Raut)(Chowdhary 2008) which facilitate marriage and other rituals. Like the other Hindu Madhesi caste groups of the Eastern and Central Tarai, they perform and celebrate all Hindu rituals and festivals. Even today, the old generation Yadav people (both male and female) strictly follow the caste hierarchy and dine together, particularly boiled rice and lentils only with the members of their own caste or higher than them. The people of old generation do not accept food and water from the low caste Hindus such as the Dalits even today.

### Data and Analysis

Three sets of data are presented here to understand the social, economic and political situations of Yadavs vs. 'All other' communities.

Social: Language (mother tongue), religion, education, gender and caste.

Economic: Ownership of land and house, occupation, household facilities, income and access to basic service institutions.

Political: Membership in political and civil society organizations.

### Social Context of Yadavs vs. All Others

Both mother tongue and religion reflect not only distinct cultural identity of people but also whether people are being included or excluded in these distinct cultural symbols.

### Mother Tongue

The mother tongues of people in Dhanusa district are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Mother tongue: Dhanusa District, 2001**

| <b>Dhanusa District</b> | <b>Mother tongues</b>                         | <b>Total</b> | <b>% of Total</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|
|                         | Nepali                                        | 37006        | 5.5               | 18770       | 18236         |
|                         | Maithili                                      | 602121       | 89.7              | 314216      | 287905        |
|                         | Bhojpuri                                      | 226          | 0.03              | 127         | 99            |
|                         | Tamang                                        | 7258         | 1.1               | 3608        | 3650          |
|                         | Newar                                         | 1511         | 0.2               | 755         | 756           |
|                         | Magar                                         | 5465         | 0.8               | 2794        | 2671          |
|                         | Urdu                                          | 5869         | 0.9               | 3021        | 2848          |
|                         | Hindi                                         | 1244         | 0.2               | 671         | 673           |
|                         | Unknown Language                              | 8175         | 1.2               | 4186        | 3989          |
|                         | Rest other languages( less than 600 speakers) | 2489         | 0.4               |             |               |
|                         | Total population                              | 671,364      | 100.03            | 349,422     | 321,942       |

Source: CBS, 2001.

As a whole, almost 90% of the total populations of Dhanusa district speak the Maithili language, followed by the Nepali speakers (5.5%) and other language groups. Other language speakers are very low in number.

Almost 98.5 per cent of Yadavs and 96.2 per cent of “all others” respondents speak the Maithili language. The Nepali speakers as a whole are less than one per cent in the sample households (Table 4).

**Table 4: Mother Tongue of Yadavs Vs. All other Respondent Households, 2008**

| Mother Tongue - Respondent | Yadavs |         | All Others |         | Total  |         |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|------------|---------|--------|---------|
|                            | Number | Percent | Number     | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Nepali                     | 0      | 0.0     | 3          | 1.6     | 3      | 0.5     |
| Tamang                     | 0      | 0.0     | 1          | 0.5     | 1      | 0.2     |
| Magar                      | 0      | 0.0     | 2          | 1.1     | 2      | 0.3     |
| Maithili                   | 402    | 98.5    | 176        | 96.2    | 578    | 97.8    |
| Thami                      | 1      | 0.2     | 0          | 0.0     | 1      | 0.2     |
| Dhimal                     | 1      | 0.2     | 0          | 0.0     | 1      | 0.2     |
| Not Stated                 | 4      | 1.0     | 1          | 0.5     | 5      | 0.8     |
| Total                      | 408    | 100.0   | 183        | 100.0   | 591    | 100.0   |
|                            |        |         |            |         |        |         |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

### Religion

The religion of people by sex in Dhanusa district based on 2001 census is given in Table 5.

**Table 5: Religion of People by Sex in Dhanusa District, 2001**

| District | Sex    | Total  | Religion |        |       |       |      |           |      |       |       |
|----------|--------|--------|----------|--------|-------|-------|------|-----------|------|-------|-------|
|          |        |        | Hindu    | Buddha | Islam | Kirat | Jain | Christian | Sikh | Bahai | Other |
| Dhanusa  | Male   | 349422 | 315416   | 4845   | 28747 | 14    | 13   | 127       | 9    | 8     | 243   |
|          | Female | 321942 | 289347   | 4851   | 27377 | 11    | 10   | 103       | 8    | 8     | 227   |
|          | Total  | 671364 | 604763   | 9796   | 56124 | 25    | 23   | 230       | 17   | 16    | 470   |
|          | %      | 100.0  | 90.1     | 1.4    | 8.4   | 0.0   | 0.0  | 0.0       | 0.0  | 0.0   | 0.1   |

Source: CBS 2002, p.242.

Dhanusa District is overwhelmingly represented by the Hindu population (90.1%), followed by Islam (8.4%). Virtually, the populations following the Kirat, Jain, Christian, Sikh and Bahai religions are almost nil in the district.

Among the sample respondents, 100 per cent of Yadavs and 93.0 per cent of "All others" are Hindus (Table 6).

**Table 6: Religion of Yadavs Vs. All Other Respondents**

|        | Yadavs | All Others | Total  |
|--------|--------|------------|--------|
| Hindu  | 408    | 170        | 578    |
|        | 100.0% | 92.9%      | 97.8%  |
| Muslim | 0      | 11         | 11     |
| Buddha | 0      | 1          | 1      |
|        | 0%     | .5%        | .2%    |
|        | .0%    | 6.0%       | 1.9%   |
| Jain   | 0      | 1          | 1      |
|        | .0%    | .5%        | .2%    |
| Total  | 408    | 183        | 591    |
|        | 100.0% | 100.0%     | 100.0% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2008.*

In brief, nobody from the Yadav and all other communities feel that they are being excluded in terms of their language and religion, the shared cultural symbols of people at the local community or the district level.

#### **Educational Status: Yadavs vs. All others**

According to the 2001 Census, the literacy rate of Yadavs as a whole was lower than the Dhanusa district (48.7%) and Nepal (54.1 %). In 2001, only 40.8 per cent of the total Yadav population 6 years and above were literate and the male and female literacy rate was 53.4 per cent and 22.6 per cent, respectively. However, the household survey data (2008) suggest that the literacy rate of Yadavs was 54.5 per cent (male 67.2 %, Female 39.6%) compared to 39.3 per cent of "all others" (Table 7). In other words, in the span of last 7 years, the literacy of Yadavs has improved significantly compared to all other groups in the

area. Regarding the level of education, a total of 20.6 per cent and 7.7 per cent of Yadavs have the high school and the BA-.level degree and above (Table 9).

**Table 7: Literacy Rate\* of Yadav Individuals**

|            | Sex    |        |        |        | Total  |        |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|            | Male   |        | Female |        | Number | %      |
|            | Number | %      | Number | %      |        |        |
| Literacy   |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Literate   | 860    | 67.2%  | 429    | 39.6%  | 1289   | 54.5%  |
| Illiterate | 420    | 32.8%  | 655    | 60.4%  | 1075   | 45.5%  |
| Total      | 1280   | 100.0% | 1084   | 100.0% | 2364   | 100.0% |

\*Literacy of Yadav population is calculated 6 years and above.

**Table 8:- Literacy Rate\* of “All Others” Individuals**

|            | Sex    |        |        |        | Total       |        |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|
|            | Male   |        | Female |        | Number<br>t | Col %  |
|            | Number | %      | Number | %      |             |        |
| Literacy   |        |        |        |        |             |        |
| Literate   | 286    | 50.0%  | 112    | 23.7%  | 398         | 38.1%  |
| Illiterate | 286    | 50.0%  | 360    | 76.3%  | 646         | 61.9%  |
| Total      | 572    | 100.0% | 472    | 100.0% | 1044        | 100.0% |

\*Literacy of “all others “in the sample population is calculated 6 years and above.

**Table9: Educational level of Yadavs vs. All others individuals in the sample households**

| Survey For | Educational Status | Educational level of Population Aged 6 + by Ethnicity |         |            |         |       |         |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|---------|-------|---------|
|            |                    | Selected Ethnic Group(Yadavs)                         |         | All Others |         | Total |         |
|            |                    | Cases                                                 | Percent | Cases      | Percent | Cases | Percent |
| Yadavs     | Illiterate         | 1075                                                  | 45.5    | 646        | 618     | 1721  | 50.5    |
|            | Literate but       | 24                                                    | 1.0     | 8          | 0.8     | 32    | 0.9     |

|  |                     |      |       |      |       |      |       |
|--|---------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
|  | No Schooling        |      |       |      |       |      |       |
|  | Primary Education   | 604  | 25.5  | 224  | 21.5  | 828  | 24.3  |
|  | Secondary Education | 473  | 20.0  | 117  | 11.2  | 590  | 17.3  |
|  | Higher Education    | 188  | 8.0   | 49   | 4.7   | 237  | 7.0   |
|  | Total               | 2364 | 100.0 | 1044 | 100.0 | 3408 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

### Education by Sex and Exclusion

In Nepali society sons are given more preference in various kinds of household and community activities than daughters (Bista 1990; Acharya 1981; Bennett 1976). This is more distinct in the field of education among many caste/ethnic groups of Nepal (CBS, 2001; New Era 2006).

The section below describes boys and girls of Yadav and all other communities in the schools and the reasons why they are in different schools.

### Boys (5-14 year age group) at Schools

Of the total 408 Yadav respondents, 125 households (34.1%) had no boys of 5-14 age groups who could go to the school. In other words, 227 households out of 283 (or 80.2 percent) of Yadav respondents sent their boys of 5-14 year age group to the school. Similarly, 78 households out of 120 (5-14) or only 65% of respondents of “all others” of this age group were in the school (Table 10).

**Table 10: School Going Boys 5-14 years among the Yadavs and all others**

| Boys go to school                  | Yadavs | All Others | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------|------------|-------|
| Yes, all of them go to school      | 227    | 78         | 305   |
|                                    | 55.6%  | 42.6%      | 51.6% |
| Some go and some others do not     | 23     | 16         | 39    |
|                                    | 5.6%   | 8.7%       | 6.6%  |
| No, all of them don't go to school | 31     | 24         | 55    |



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|                                          |       |       |       |
|------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                          | 7.6%  | 13.1% | 9.3%  |
| No children of this age in the household | 125   | 63    | 188   |
|                                          | 34.1% | 34.4% | 31.8% |
| Missing Cases                            | 2     | 2     | 4     |
|                                          | .5%   | 1.1%  | .7%   |
| Total                                    | 408   | 183   | 591   |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

**Girls (5-14 year age group) at Schools**

Of the total 397 Yadav respondents, 149 had no girls of this age group. In other words, of the total 248 Yadav respondents, 178 respondents (77.8%) sent their girl to the school. Similarly, 83 respondents of all other communities had no girl child of this age group out of 180 respondents, suggesting that 102 respondents (56.7%) only sent their girl to schools (Table 11)

**Table 11: School going girls among Yadavs and all others**

| Girls go to school                       | Yadavs | All Others | Total  |
|------------------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|
| Yes, all of them go to school            | 178    | 51         | 229    |
|                                          | 44.8%  | 28.3%      | 39.7%  |
| Some go and some others do not           | 23     | 8          | 31     |
|                                          | 5.8%   | 4.4%       | 5.4%   |
| No, all of them don't go to school       | 47     | 38         | 85     |
|                                          | 11.8%  | 21.1%      | 14.7%  |
| No children of this age in the household | 149    | 83         | 232    |
|                                          | 40.6%  | 46.1%      | 40.2%  |
| Total                                    | 397    | 180        | 577    |
|                                          | 100.0% | 100.0%     | 100.0% |

Source: Field survey, 2008.

In brief, the percentage of girls is lower than boys in both the Yadav and all other communities at schools. This suggests that Yadavs and all other communities of Dhanusa district discriminate girls in sending schools.

#### **Types of schools attended by boys and girls**

The sex discrimination in school can easily be observed while noting the type of schools attended by boys and girls from the Yadav and all other communities in Dhanusa district. If 16.7 percent of Yadav boys attended the private school/college at home compared to only 13.0 percent of Yadav girls. Likewise, if 8.2 percent of Yadav boys attended the private school/college at other places compared to only 4.6 per cent of Yadav girls. More Yadav girls (85.1%) than boys (79.4%) were at government schools at home. The picture of “all others” was also the same in the target area (Table 12 and 13). The only reason for this is that the private schools are more expensive compared to the government schools and as girls go to somebody's house after marriage, there is no reason why to spend more money for them in the name of education. This also reflects the low social status females in the Hindu Madhesi society.

**Table 12: Type of schools attended by boys among Yadavs and all others**

|                      |                                                  | Yadav  |       | All Others |       |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|------------|-------|
|                      |                                                  | Number | %     | Number     | %     |
| Where the Boys Study | Government school college at home                | 204    | 79.4% | 80         | 84.2% |
|                      | Government school college at other place         | 9      | 3.5%  | 4          | 4.2%  |
|                      | Private school /college at home                  | 43     | 16.7% | 11         | 11.6% |
|                      | Private school/l college at other places( Nepal) | 21     | 8.2%  | 2          | 2.1%  |
|                      | India                                            | 1      | .4%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                      | US Europe Australia East Asia                    | 0      | .0%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                      | Other Countries                                  | 2      | .8%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                      |                                                  |        |       |            |       |

Source: Field Survey 2008

**Table 13: Type of schools attended by girls among Yadavs and all others**

|                       |                                            | Yadav  |       | All Others |       |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------|-------|------------|-------|
|                       |                                            | Number | %     | Number     | %     |
| Where the Girls Study | Govt school /college at home               | 166    | 85.1% | 51         | 91.1% |
|                       | Govt school /college at other place        | 7      | 3.6%  | 0          | .0%   |
|                       | Pvt school /college at home                | 26     | 13.3% | 6          | 10.7% |
|                       | Pvt school college at other places( Nepal) | 9      | 4.6%  | 0          | .0%   |
|                       | India                                      | 0      | .0%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                       | US Europe Australia                        | 0      | .0%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                       | East Asia                                  | 0      | .0%   | 0          | .0%   |
|                       | Other Countries                            | 2      | 1.0%  | 0          | .0%   |

Source: Field Survey 2008

### **Caste-based Discrimination**

The caste based discrimination among the various ethnic/caste groups is very high in Dhanusa district. The Hindu caste groups including the Tarai Adibasi/Janajati are very orthodox in terms of caste hierarchy and its related values in their everyday life.

Most of the Yadav respondents mentioned that they strictly followed the Hindu caste rules. Within the Yadav community, there are three major subgroups such as Majhaut, Ghosin and Kisot and each group claims to be superior to other group and do not marry within these subgroups. An old Yadav man of the study area presents views about the caste system and untouchability as practiced in the area. Mr. Yadavis an old man of 75 years in the village, who is still contributing labor to the family. He has a big family with 4 sons, daughter-in-laws and grand sons and granddaughters. None of his sons and daughters attended the college level education (10+.2 and above).

Mr Yadav says “He does not want to see the face of a person of Teli caste (Teli group is still considered untouchable by some people in this area) early in

the morning. If it happens, the whole day becomes worthless". He says "the caste system and untouchability should not be abolished". He does not allow any other caste to enter into his kitchen. He also does not accept water and food from other castes lower than him".

A story narrated by a Dalit woman about the caste discrimination is as follows:

"Yadavs of this area used to put thorns in front of their wells or water taps so that Dalits should not fetch water from their wells or water taps. In some Yadav houses, the Dalit people are still treated like this even today. They are not allowed to fetch water from their taps".

Though caste hierarchy has been little relaxed in terms of dining food with other groups in the market areas these days, the caste discrimination is very high even today. A caste group excludes the other caste member considering his caste higher than him/her at the household and the community level.

Regarding the question on inter-caste marriage within the family and neighborhood, only 2 Yadav (0.5%) and 1 from all other communities (0.5%) respondents had an inter-caste marriage over the last two decades. In other words, considering the caste structure and hierarchy among the Tarai Hindu caste groups, inter-caste marriage is still not encouraged among Yadavs and all other groups.

*Dal-bhat* (boiled rice and lentils) plays very important roles in Nepali culture, particularly among the Hindu caste groups of Nepali society in general and Yadavs and other communities of Dhanusa district in particular. If somebody accepts *Dal-bhat* from any members of the family (excluding unmarried girls and ritually not purified boys) and from members lower than one's own caste outside home, he/she should be understood as :a) He/she is a spoiled member of the family who does not follow caste rules ; b) Family is becoming modern and the family does not care who eats where, and c) A member who does not accept cooked food other than the prescribed member from the family or outside, he/she is pious person and has an honor and respect within the family or outside. So who cooks or eats where, are some of the important dimensions of food culture in Dhanusa district. In brief, caste still plays pivotal role in the social structure of various groups in question, and exclusion of one group to another is common in terms of caste values whether it is the case of inter caste marriage or

accepting *Dal-bhat* from other members lower than them. Reasons are several: a) They are least exposed to the outside world and consider their own values superior to others', b) Because of the low level of education, particularly the people of old generation, the norms of caste values based on Hindu religion are the only way earning virtues in life .

#### **Gender Issue: Yadavs vs. all others**

It is quite obvious that gender discrimination is quite high in Nepali society in general and Madhesi Hindu communities in particular. The section below discusses the status of women of Yadav and communities of “all others” in the larger context of Madhesi women in general. Literacy, property ownership and decision making processes are some of the social indicators assessing the overall status of women compared to men. The literacy of females is lower compared to males among Yadavs, and allother communities of Dhanusa district (see Tables 8, 9, 10). In terms of higher education, i.e. the S.LC pass and above, the females are virtually insignificant in number among Yadavs and all other communities compared to the males. Regarding the ownership of land, only 15.0 percent and 7.7 percent of female respondents from the Yadav and other communities own land in the study area ( Dahal 2009). In addition, not a single woman possesses ownership of the house and assets such as television, radio and motorcycle.

Considering the issue of overall decision makers at the household and the community level” among the Yadavs and all others, the “overall decision makers” at the household level by women is lower than men among Yadavs, and all other communities (Table 14).

**Table 14: Overall Decision makers at the household level by sex and caste/ethnicity**

|                        |       | Yadav | All Others | Total |
|------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|
| Overall Decision Maker | Men   | 157   | 54         | 211   |
|                        |       | 38.5% | 29.5%      | 35.7% |
|                        | Women | 60    | 27         | 87    |

|       |            |        |        |        |
|-------|------------|--------|--------|--------|
|       |            | 14.7%  | 14.8%  | 14.7%  |
|       | Both       | 190    | 100    | 290    |
|       |            | 46.6%  | 54.6%  | 49.1%  |
|       | Not Stated | 1      | 2      | 3      |
|       |            | .2%    | 1.1%   | .5%    |
| Total |            | 408    | 183    | 591    |
|       |            | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

#### Economic Conditions: Mode of Livelihood

The section below discusses the economic conditions of Yadavs vs. “all others” in Dhanusa district. Six sets of data are presented to reflect the economic conditions”: i) Ownership of land, ii) Occupation, iii) Food sufficiency, iv) Ownership of house, v) Income and ownership of household facilities and vi) Access to service institutions. The objective here is to assess the current economic conditions of Yadavs, and all other communities at the household and the community level and compare their economic conditions with other similar cultural groups living in Dhanusa district. This way it becomes easier how much the target groups are excluded/included in the given economic indicators compared to other similar cultural groups in Tarai districts in general and Dhanusa district in particular.

Yadavs in the Tarai are mostly agriculturists. They raise animals like cattle, buffaloes and goats. Landholding is one of the major sources of income and mode of livelihood. The average landownership of land among Yadavs and all others is given in Table15.

**Table 15: Land ownership among Yadavs and All others**

| Average Landholding<br>(in hectare) | Number and percentage of respondents (Yadavs and Others) |         |            |         |        |         |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|---------|--------|---------|
|                                     | Yadavs                                                   |         | All Others |         | Total  |         |
|                                     | Number                                                   | Percent | Number     | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Landless Households                 | 51                                                       | 12.5    | 67         | 36.6    | 118    | 20.0    |

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|                        |     |       |     |       |     |       |
|------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| Less than 1 Hectare    | 224 | 54.9  | 95  | 51.9  | 319 | 54.0  |
| One to 2 Hectares      | 78  | 19.1  | 15  | 8.2   | 93  | 15.7  |
| Two to 3 Hectares      | 23  | 5.6   | 3   | 1.6   | 26  | 4.4   |
| Three to 4 Hectares    | 16  | 3.9   | 0   | 0.0   | 16  | 2.7   |
| Four to 5 Hectares     | 2   | 0.5   | 0   | 0.0   | 2   | 0.3   |
| Five Hectares and More | 14  | 3.4   | 3   | 1.6   | 17  | 2.9   |
| Total                  | 408 | 100.0 | 183 | 100.0 | 591 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

A total of 51 Yadav households (12.5 per cent) owned no land at all and 54.9 per cent owned less than one hectare of land. Almost 33 per cent of total Yadav households owned more than one hectare of land and 14 Yadav household/families (3.4%) had ownership of five hectares and more land in the area, suggesting some Yadavs are relatively rich in terms of land holding (Table 14). The mean land ownership of Yadavs was 1.13 hectares compared to average land holding of 0.95 hectare per household/family/ in Nepal.

In “all other groups”, 67 households (36.6%) owned no land at all, and 95 households (51.9%) own less than one hectare, suggesting more poor households in terms of land ownership compared to Yadav households in Dhanusa district.

## Occupation

The main occupation of Yadavs and all others of 10 years and above in the sampled households is given in Table 16.

**Table 16: Main occupation of individuals sample population of 10 years and above among Yadav and all others in sample households in Dhanusa**

| Main Occupation for Sample Population 10+ Years of Age |        |         |            |         |       |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|------------|---------|-------|---------|
|                                                        | Yadavs |         | All others |         |       |         |
|                                                        | Cases  | Percent | Cases      | Percent | Cases | Percent |
| Agriculture                                            | 591    | 28.8    | 107        | 11.8    | 698   | 23.6    |
| Animal husbandry                                       | 51     | 2.5     | 9          | 1.0     | 60    | 2.0     |
| Fishing                                                | 3      | 0.1     | 2          | 0.2     | 5     | 0.2     |
| Porter                                                 | 3      | 0.1     | 1          | 0.1     | 4     | 0.1     |
| Agriculture wage within Nepal                          | 75     | 3.7     | 136        | 14.9    | 211   | 7.1     |

|                                          |      |       |     |       |      |       |
|------------------------------------------|------|-------|-----|-------|------|-------|
| Agriculture wage outside Nepal           | 10   | 0.5   | 4   | 0.4   | 14   | 0.5   |
| Non- Agriculture wage labor within Nepal | 45   | 2.2   | 52  | 5.7   | 97   | 3.3   |
| Non-agriculture wage labor outside Nepal | 138  | 6.7   | 81  | 8.9   | 219  | 7.4   |
| service in Nepal                         | 71   | 3.5   | 17  | 1.9   | 88   | 3.0   |
| Service outside Nepal                    | 51   | 2.5   | 9   | 1.0   | 60   | 2.0   |
| Trade Business                           | 26   | 1.3   | 29  | 3.2   | 55   | 1.9   |
| Household Job                            | 418  | 20.4  | 215 | 23.6  | 633  | 21.4  |
| Student                                  | 415  | 20.2  | 134 | 14.7  | 549  | 18.5  |
| Dependents                               | 142  | 6.9   | 89  | 9.8   | 231  | 7.8   |
| Others                                   | 10   | 0.5   | 20  | 2.2   | 30   | 1.0   |
| Don't know                               | 2    | 0.1   | 2   | 0.2   | 4    | 0.1   |
| Not stated                               | 0    | 0.0   | 3   | 0.3   | 3    | 0.1   |
| Total                                    | 2051 | 100.0 | 910 | 100.0 | 2961 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

The main occupation of Yadav individuals (total 2,051 populations) and all others (910 individuals) 10 years and above in the sample VDC/municipality of Dhanusa district are agriculture (28.8%), followed by household job (20.4%). The household job clearly indicates the activities of women at the household level. Nevertheless, wage labor within Nepal or outside Nepal and non-agricultural wage labor within Nepal or outside Nepal constitute a significant percentage (13.1 %) as the main occupation of the Yadav people. The student populations account for a significant percent (20.2%) among Yadavs. In the case of all others, the populations engaged in agriculture is low (23.6. %) but many of them are engaged in wage labor (agricultural and non-agricultural) jobs within and outside Nepal.

Considering the relatively well being in terms of landholding among Yadavs and all other communities compared to their neighbors. Yadav group is relatively better off in terms of land holding compared to their neighbors: 49 percent were on average whereas 18.7 percent were above average and well off. Only 23.0 percent of Yadav sample households considered themselves “below average” in terms of landholding compared to their neighbors (Table 17). On the other hand,



only 44.8 per cent of “all other” groups were average and 4.9 per cent were above average and well off.

**Table 17: Land holding Status of Yadavs and All Others compared to their neighbors**

| Status of family Landholding | Yadavs |         | All Others |         | Total |
|------------------------------|--------|---------|------------|---------|-------|
|                              | Cases  | Percent | Cases      | Percent | Cases |
| Well off                     | 19     | 4.7     | 1          | 0.5     | 20    |
| Above the average            | 57     | 14.0    | 8          | 4.4     | 65    |
| Average                      | 200    | 49.0    | 82         | 44.8    | 282   |
| Below average                | 94     | 23.0    | 41         | 22.4    | 135   |
| At the bottom stratum        | 37     | 9.1     | 51         | 27.9    | 88    |
| DNK                          | 1      | 0.2     | 0          | 0.0     | 1     |
| Total                        | 408    | 100.0   | 183        | 100.0   | 591   |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

### Housing

Almost all Yadavs in the sample (405 households) own a house. Not only that 6 Yadavs (1.5%) had rented out their house and 3 Yadavs (0.7%) also rented (as they have no house of their own) in the house from others (Table18). This suggests that some Yadavs have built more than one house and rented out a house for the extra income. Similarly, 181 households from all other communities also own a house in the study area.

**Table18: Ownership of House by Yadavs and all Others**

| Caste/ethnicity |      | No. of House - Own use | No. of House Rented out | No. of House – Rented in | No. of House – Others |
|-----------------|------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Yadavs          | Mean | 1.60                   | 2.83                    | 1.00                     | 1.33                  |
|                 | N    | 401                    | 6                       | 3                        | 3                     |
| All Others      | Mean | 1.28                   | 1.67                    | 1.00                     |                       |
|                 | N    | 179                    | 3                       | 2                        |                       |
| Total           | Mean | 1.50                   | 2.44                    | 1.00                     | 1.33                  |
|                 | N    | 580                    | 9                       | 5                        | 3                     |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

### Income

The income from various sources is the mode of livelihood of people. The income of Yadavs and all others ranges from salary and pension, business, remittance, sale of crops, vegetables and milk and so on. A lot of respondents from both the Yadav and all other communities mentioned that salary and pension were the major source of income beyond agricultural products (Table 18). In total, the monthly income of Yadav individuals was Rs. 2, 275.00 and all others were 2,221.53. In brief, the annual income of Yadav individual was NRS 27,300 (per capita equivalent USD 355.00) at the 2008 prices (Table 19). "All others" have the slightly lower annual income compared to Yadavs. But this income is lower than the national average of USD 470 per annum (Kantipur June 2009) (Table 20) because of their average large family size (6.5 member per family).

**Table 19: Mean Monthly Income of Yadavs and All others (in Rs.)**

| Yadavs                    |                        |                       | All Others                  |                       |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Sources of Income         | Number of Yadav Res/HH | Mean Income Per month | Number of all others Res/HH | Mean Income Per month |
| Salary, pension, etc      | 226                    | 7,222.92              | 72                          | 6108.68               |
| Rent (House/land selling) | 0                      | 0.0                   | 1                           | 15,000.00             |
| Rent (machinery/others)   | 6                      | 6,533.33              | 1                           | 2,000.00              |
| Wage labor                | 100                    | 4,554.00              | 72                          | 4200.00               |
| Shop-stall, trade-hotel   | 20                     | 6,660.00              | 12                          | 9583.00               |
| Milk and milk products    | 49                     | 1,622.45              | 7                           | 971.43                |
| Remittance (internal)     | 45                     | 11,500                | 14                          | 19537.14              |
| Humanitarian support      | 3                      | 15,333.33             | 0                           | 0.0                   |
| Others                    | 51                     | 5,598.04              | 32                          | 6465.63               |
| Cereals and cash crops    | 156                    | 26,160.90             | 21                          | 17,414.21             |
| Vegetables (all seasons)  | 52                     | 8,259.62              | 2                           | 23000.00              |
| Fruits                    | 9                      | 6744.44               | 1                           | 2000.00               |

|                               |    |            |    |           |
|-------------------------------|----|------------|----|-----------|
| Livestock                     | 50 | 8640.00    | 14 | 7028.57   |
| House and land selling        | 2  | 10,500.00, | 2  | 13,500.00 |
| Contract (construction plus ) | 3  | 10,000.00  | 2  | 10,000.00 |
| Remittance (international)    | 42 | 105,279.46 | 58 | 93048.28  |
| Mine/Quarry                   | 2  | 64,000.00  | 1  | 3,000     |
| Others                        | 32 | 58,182.00  | 14 | 4600.00   |

Source: Field Survey, 2008(note multiple responses)

**Table 20: Mean Monthly Income status of Yadavs and all other individuals**

|            | Mean       | N    | Std. Deviation |
|------------|------------|------|----------------|
| Yadavs     | 2,275.0928 | 2695 | 5773.01139     |
| All Others | 2,221.5330 | 1197 | 5398.47643     |
| Total      | 2258.6202  | 3892 | 5659.82424     |

Source: Field survey 2008

#### **Ownership of Various Items (Facilities) at Home**

The objective here is to note the variation of ownership of household facilities or amenities of life among Yadavs and all other communities living in Dhanusa district. These household facilities include the bicycle, motor cycle,/car/jeep, tractor/bus, electricity, radio, television, telephone and so on(Table21).

**Table 21: Household amenities among Yadav and All Others respondent households**

| Household Items   | Yadavs(HS) | All Others(HS) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Bicycle           | 267        | 111            |
|                   |            | 24.2           |
| Motorcycle        | 28         | 2              |
|                   |            | .4             |
| Car Jeep          | 3          |                |
| Tractor Truck Bus | 9          |                |

|                          |     |    |
|--------------------------|-----|----|
| Electricity              | 140 | 68 |
| Radio                    | 181 | 81 |
| Television               | 70  | 23 |
| Telephone                | 68  | 25 |
| Refrigerator             | 3   | 1  |
| Bio-gas Plant            | 1   | 1  |
| Solar System Heater Lamp | 1   | 1  |
|                          |     | 2  |

*Source: Field Survey, 2008; note multiple answers*

Bicycle, electricity, radio, television and telephone are common household facilities kept by both Yadavs and all other groups. A total of 58.2 percent of Yadav respondents own a bicycle, followed by a radio (39.4%), electricity (30.5%), television (15.3%) and telephone (14.8%). The ownership of these items is much lower among all “other groups”. However, television is gradually becoming popular as household item. Bicycle is the cheapest and common mode of transport for both males and females in Nepal Tarai in general and Dhanusa district in particular. In brief, bicycle, radio and electricity have become basic necessities of life among Yadavs, and “all others” in Dhanusa district.

#### **Access to Government and Public Services**

Access to facilities in the form of government and public services in everyday life of people is another dimension of understanding how the government and other institutions are working to improve the quality of life of people at the community level. Some of the questions included in such services are: access to drinking water, post office, telephone, public transport, health post/hospital, primary/lower secondary/secondary schools, campus/college and electricity. Data are presented in the form of services available to the people at the VDC and the municipality level (Table 22).

**Table 22: Access to basic services at the VDC/municipality level by caste/ethnicity**

| Access to Facilities   | Caste/ethnicity | Access to services at the VDC level (total 371 Respondents) with % | Access to services at the Municipality level (total 37 Respondents) With % | Total Respondents |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Drinking Water Supply  | Yadavs          | 97.3                                                               | 97.3                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All others      | 97.7                                                               | 100.0                                                                      | 183               |
| Post Office            | Yadavs          | 44.7                                                               | 37.8                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All others      | 37.0                                                               | 28.6                                                                       | 193               |
| Telephone              | Yadav           | 92.5                                                               | 97.3                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All others      | 90.1                                                               | 95.2                                                                       | 183               |
| Public Transport       | Yadav           | 33.7                                                               | 73.0                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All Others      | 27.8                                                               | 66.7                                                                       | 183               |
| Health Post            | Yadav           | 75.7                                                               | 51.4                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All Others s    | 75.9                                                               | 28.6                                                                       | 183               |
| Hospital               | Yadav           | 8.1                                                                | 10.8                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All Others      | 6.8                                                                | 19.0                                                                       | 183               |
| Primary School         | Yadav           | 85.7                                                               | 78.4                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All others      | 91.4                                                               | 85.7                                                                       | 183               |
| Lower Secondary School | Yadav           | 43.4                                                               | 54.1                                                                       | 408               |
|                        | All Others      | 38.9                                                               | 66.7                                                                       | 183               |

|                  |            |      |       |     |
|------------------|------------|------|-------|-----|
| Secondary School | Yadav      | 28.6 | 13.5  | 408 |
|                  | All others | 23.5 | 28.6  | 183 |
| Campus/College   | Yadav      | 2.7  | 13.5  | 408 |
|                  | All Others | 3.1  | 19.0  | 183 |
| Electricity      | Yadav      | 41.0 | 89.2  | 408 |
|                  | All Others | 43.2 | 100.0 | 183 |

*Source: Field Survey, 2008*

Except few items most of Yadavs and all others have access to basic services at their own VDC or the municipality level. More than 97 percent of Yadavs and all others have access to drinking water supply. Water from hand pumps and wells is easily available because of the flat terrains. Similarly, access to telephone services is also very high in the VDC and the urban area (92.5% Yadavs, 90.1 % all others). Other easily available services, where more than 70 percent of the people have access to is the primary schools. The least access services or where less than 10 percent of people have access to are: hospitals, and campus /college. The moderate access to services by the Yadav community are :electricity(n 41 per cent ) and public transport(33.7 per cent ) .In brief, considering many ethnic /caste groups living in the Hills and Mountain areas of Nepal , Yadavs and all other communities of Dhanusa district have easy access to various service delivery institutions within their VDCs and municipality. In this sense, they are better included compared to many other groups of Nepal.

#### **Political Context: Mode of Participation in Public Life**

Considering the macro picture of political participation of Yadavs vs. all others in the local bodies and the national politics, Yadavs are quite active at all levels of political and caste/ethnicity based organizations compared to similar other Madhesi groups in the Tarai. In the 1999 General Election, out of 42 Madhesi Members of Parliament (MP) in the 20 districts of the Tarai, 11 Members of Parliament (26.2%) were Yadavs. Similarly in the Constituent Assembly Election 2008, of the total 601MPS , 199 MPs were from the Madhesi groups and of them 46 were Yadavs(23.1 per cent from the Madhesi groups) (Election Commission,

2008). In most of the Eastern and Central Tarai Districts, Yadavs were the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Ward Members of the VDC and DDC. 4 Yadavs (20 %) were Chairman and 4 were Vice Chairman (20%) in the 20 District Development committees of the Tarai (Khanal and Hacchethu: 1999). Yadavs have remained as cabinet Ministers in Nepal since the 1960 onwards. Currently, a Yadav is the President of Nepal and another Yadav is the Information Minister. Likewise, Yadavs have become the Deputy Speaker and Foreign Minister in Nepal. Some Yadavs are occupying key positions in the academic institutions and the government administrative services.

### **Membership and Participation in Civil Society Organizations and Political Parties**

In the village society production and consumption are not only the daily activities of people but they also participate in political and civil society organizations. The intention of a person here is to not only to show his/her presence in various political and civil society organizations but also to contribute to the community and society at large in the development processes and to indicate the group mobilization process as well. In addition, individuals/family members are benefited in several ways once they are involved in political and civil society organizations.

The section below discusses the involvement of Yadavs and all other respondents and their families participating in various political and civil society organizations. Two sets of data are presented to assess the political /civil society participation and group mobilization: i) Membership and participation in civil society organizations and ii) Membership and participation in political parties and Local level Committees.

### **Participation in Civil Society Organizations**

In Nepal, there are various types of civil society organizations such as the caste/ethnicity based organizations and some are cooperatives, and some are labor, students, and women organizations. In addition, many ethnic/caste groups are closely associated with their own ethnic/caste campaign groups. The section below notes briefly how many individual members of the Yadav and all other communities of the study area are involved in various caste/ethnicity and religious based organizations such as the Madhesi, Adibasi/Janajati, Dalit, Mukit

Abhiyan, Religious and others (Table 23). A total of 112 Yadav respondents (27.5 %) were involved in various caste/ethnicity and religion based organizations (Table 23). Similarly, a total of 37 respondents (20.2%) from other communities were involved in these various organizations.

But if total membership is counted as hundred per cent, participation of Yadavs and "all other" was 73.2 percent and 56.8 per cent in Madhesi organizations/campaigns, respectively. Though Yadavs and all others claimed to be Madhesi, many of them were not interested in becoming a member of this type of organization. Only 2.0 per cent of Yadavs had membership in Janajati movement compared to only 1.1 per cent of all other communities. Again 0.5 percent of Yadavs had taken membership in Dalit movement compared to 4.9 percent of all other communities. It is because there are more Tarai Dalits respondents in all other communities and thus they were more involved in Dalit organization. Similarly, only 2.5 percent of Yadavs had membership in liberation movement compared to 0.5 percent of all other communities. Very negligible percent of Yadavs (1.2%) and all other communities (1.15%) had membership in religious movement.

**Table 23: Membership in Caste/Religion based Organizations – Yadavs and All Others**

| Caste/religion based organizations |                      | Yadavs |      | All Others |      |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|--------|------|------------|------|
|                                    |                      | Number | %    | Number     | %    |
|                                    | Madhesi              | 82     | 20.1 | 21         | 11.5 |
|                                    | Janajati             | 8      | 2.0  | 2          | 1.1  |
|                                    | Dalit                | 2      | 0.5  | 9          | 4.9  |
|                                    | Liberation movements | 10     | 2.5  | 1          | 0.5  |
|                                    | Religious            | 5      | 1.2  | 2          | 1.1  |
|                                    | Others               | 5      | 1.2  | 2          | 1.1  |



|                             |  |     |      |     |      |
|-----------------------------|--|-----|------|-----|------|
| Total Membership            |  | 112 | 27.5 | 37  | 20.2 |
| Total Respondent Households |  | 408 |      | 183 |      |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

### Level of Representation in political parties

What is the highest level of representation of a member of Yadav and all other groups in a political party? The level of representation by members in any political party is given in Table 24. Of the total 55 Yadav individuals who responded the question of representation in any political party, the maximum number of representation in any political party was up to the Ward (54.5%) and the VDV level (34.5%). Nevertheless, 5.5 percent of respondents were also represented in the Ilaka and the District level party as well. Of the total 9 respondents who represented in any political party from all other communities, 77.8percent and 22.2 percent represented up to the Ward and the VDC level. In the Ilaka and district level, the representation of all other communities is nil in the study area of Dhanusa district.

**Table 24: Highest level of representation by members in any political party by caste/ethnicity**

| Caste/ethnicity                                           |             | Yadavs | All Others | Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|------------|-------|
| Highest level of representation of members in the parties | Ward Level  | 30     | 7          | 37    |
|                                                           |             | 54.5%  | 77.8%      | 57.8% |
|                                                           | VDC Level   | 19     | 2          | 21    |
|                                                           |             | 34.5%  | 22.2%      | 32.8% |
|                                                           | Ilaka Level | 3      | 0          | 3     |
|                                                           |             | 5.5%   | .0%        | 4.7%  |
|                                                           | District    | 3      | 0          | 3     |

|       |       |        |        |        |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
|       | Level | 5.5%   | .0%    | 4.7%   |
| Total |       | 55     | 9      | 64     |
|       |       | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Field Survey, 2008

### Conclusion

The Hindu caste structure is a dominant variable of exclusion at the household and the community level in Dhanusa district. The target groups in all the field sites of Dhanua district strictly follow the caste rules in marriage, food, and other aspects of day- to- day life. Within the neighborhood as well, inter caste marriage is not common. Gender is another dominant model of exclusion at the household and the community level. There is more favorable situation for boys than girls in attending schools at the community level. Discrimination between boys and girls is observed in attending different types of schools among Yadavs, and all other communities. The males of Yadav and all other communities are the overall decision makers at the household and the community level.

Regarding economic context and mode of livelihood Yadavs are relatively better off groups in economic condition and quality of life than all other communities in Dhanusa district .There were 3.4 percent Yadav households who owned more than five hectares of land. Similarly in participating in the local bodies and national politics the Yadavs are the most successful community among the Madhesi groups today. Even at the local level, they take part better in local caste/ethnicity and religion based organization than other communities in the area.

To sum up, Yadavs of Tarai are taking the lead in terms of occupying key political and administrative positions in Nepal as a whole. They are the most actively participating political group among the Madhesi groups in Nepal. So, simply labeling the Madhesi people as excluded without understanding their social, economic and political situations of people is the myopic way of dealing with and using the term, social inclusion/exclusion. In other words, Yadavs are not at all excluded community in the given economic and political indicators of the society. But at the same time, there is systematic exclusion of gender and lower caste groups by Yadavs in their everyday lives. So, the concept of social inclusion and exclusion is not a single package to deal with as the same cultural

group differs in the given social, economic and political indicators of the society (Oommen 2009).

### Appendix 1.

**Table : Population Size of the "Madhese" groups, based in 2001 census**

| High caste groups       | Total Population | % of the total population of Tarai |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Maithil (Tarai) Brahmin | 134,496          | 1.2                                |
| Rajput                  | 48,454           | 0.4                                |
| Kayastha                | 46,071           | 0.4                                |
| Yadav                   | 895,423          | 8.0                                |
| Total High caste groups | 1,124,444        | 10.0                               |
| Middle caste groups     |                  |                                    |
| Teli                    | 304,536          | 2.7                                |
| Koiri/Kushhawa          | 251,274          | 2.2                                |
| Kurmi                   | 212,842          | 1.9                                |
| Dhanuk                  | 188,150          | 1.7                                |
| Sonar                   | 145,088          | 1.3                                |
| Kewat                   | 136,953          | 1.2                                |
| Baniya                  | 126,971          | 1.1                                |
| Mallaha                 | 115,606          | 1.0                                |
| Kalwar                  | 115,606          | 1.0                                |
| Hajam/Thakur            | 98,826           | 0.9                                |
| Kanu                    | 95,826           | 0.9                                |
| Sudhi                   | 89,846           | 0.8                                |
| Lohar                   | 82,637           | 0.7                                |
| Nuniya                  | 66,873           | 0.6                                |
| Kumhar                  | 54,413           | 0.5                                |
| Halwai                  | 50,583           | 0.5                                |
| Badahi                  | 45,975           | 0.5                                |
| Barae                   | 35,434           | 0.3                                |
| Kahar                   | 34,531           | 0.3                                |
| Lodha                   | 24,738           | 0.2                                |

|                                |           |      |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------|
| Rajbhar                        | 24,263    | 0.2  |
| Binda/Binda                    | 18,720    | 0.2  |
| Bhediya/Gaderi                 | 17,729    | 0.2  |
| Mali                           | 11,390    | 0.1  |
| Kamar                          | 8,761     | 0.08 |
| Dhuniya                        | 1,231     | 0.01 |
| Total middle caste groups      | 2,358,525 | 21.0 |
| Low caste groups (Dalits)      |           |      |
| Chamar/Harijan/Ram             | 269,661   | 2.4  |
| Musahar                        | 173,434   | 1.5  |
| Dushad/Paswan/Pasi             | 158,525   | 1.4  |
| Tatma                          | 76,512    | 0.7  |
| Khatwe                         | 74,972    | 0.7  |
| Dhobi                          | 73,413    | 0.7  |
| Bantar                         | 35,839    | 0.3  |
| Chidimar                       | 12,296    | 0.1  |
| Halkhor                        | 3,621     | 0.03 |
| Patharkatta/Kushwadia          | 552       | 0.00 |
| Total low caste (dalit) groups | 887,756   | 7.9  |
| Adivasi/Janajati               |           |      |
| Tharu                          | 1,533,879 | 13.7 |
| Rajbansi                       | 95,812    | 0.9  |
| Santhal/Satar                  | 43,698    | 0.4  |
| Dhanger/Jhanger                | 41,764    | 0.4  |
| Gangai                         | 31,318    | 0.3  |
| Tajpuriya                      | 13,250    | 0.1  |
| Meche                          | 3,763     | 0.03 |
| Kisan                          | 2,876     | 0.02 |
| Koche                          | 1,821     | 0.02 |
| Munda                          | 1,015     | 0.01 |
| Total: Adivasi/Janajati        | 1,769,196 | 15.8 |
| Muslim                         | 971,056   | 0.4  |
| Other Groups                   |           |      |
| Marwadi                        | 43,971    | 0.4  |

|                                       |            |       |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-------|
| Bengali                               | 9,860      | 0.1   |
| Punjabi/Sikh                          | 3,054      | 0.03  |
| Total                                 | 56,885     | 0.5   |
| Total Tarai or Madhesi groups         | 7,167,862  | 63.9  |
| Total Tarai Population in 2001 Census | 11,212,453 | 100.0 |

Source: CBS 2001.

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# SAVING ENDANGERED LANGUAGES VIA UNNATURAL SELECTION & UTILITY THEORY<sup>1</sup>

Tej Man Angdembe

## Abstract

*A spectre is haunting Nepal– the spectre of a myriad of helpless marginalized languages going hopelessly down to their dark graves and the possible loss of peace arising there from! ‘Optimistic estimates of what is happening suggest that at least 50% of today’s spoken languages may be extinct or very seriously endangered---around the year 2100. Pessimistic but still completely realistic estimates claim that as many as 90-95% of the spoken languages may be extinct or very seriously endangered during this century. Most of the disappearing languages will be indigenous languages (UNESCO 2003b)’ (Thokar 2009: 343). This scenario of marginalized languages looks extremely horrible to many, if not to some.*

*It is often propagated that it is never possible to save all of the endangered languages in a multilingual country like Nepal because multilingual/poly-lingual language policy is practically impossible to implement, whereas a bilingual or trilingual language policy can save only two or three languages. Even more horrible conclusion is that even if we adopt a bilingual or trilingual language policy the powerful language will, in course of time, kill the weak ones and there again emerges a monolingual situation because Darwin’s theory of natural selection holds everywhere in this planet.*

*However, there is nothing impossible in this world if one wishes. I believe that a monolingual policy can save a language (as Khas Nepali was) and contend that, wherever possible, the same monolingual language policy must be adopted to save the endangered languages of Nepal by selecting them unnaturally and resorting to the utility theory of economics. I argue that unnatural selection and the utility theory can prove to be a strong medical tablet and vaccination against the Darwinian cancer of endangered languages.*

*A horrible spectre is haunting Nepal–the spectre of a myriad of helpless marginalized languages going hopelessly down to their dark graves and the horrible loss of peace resulting there from! ‘Optimistic estimates of what is*

happening suggest that at least 50% of today's spoken languages may be extinct or very seriously endangered---around the year 2100. Pessimistic but still completely realistic estimates claim that as many as 90-95% of the spoken languages may be extinct or very seriously endangered during this century. Most of the disappearing languages will be indigenous languages (UNESCO 2003b)' (Thokar 2009: 343).

According to van Driem (2007), 'All Munda language communities are under heavy demographic and socio-economic pressure to assimilate linguistically to the local Indo-Aryan majority language (p. 307). The (Dhimal) language is rapidly being lost in favour of Nepali (p. 321). Under the currently prevailing sociolinguistic conditions Limbu is likely to be completely extinct by the end of this century (p. 325). Most Magar communities have abandoned their language in favour of Nepali (p. 330). In Nepal, more than hundred languages are thus being throttled by the state sponsored Khas Nepali language.<sup>2</sup> As a result, some of the vernacular languages have already gone to the hell, and the remaining are breathing their last to join their poor but dead fellows in this horrible hell. This scenario of marginalized languages looks extremely horrible to hundreds, if not to a handful.

Language is dynamic, gets old and dies as Sanskrit, Roman and Greek. Everybody accepts this natural death, but can never accept an unnatural death. Survival and death of languages is subject to the Darwinian natural selection. In other words, survival of the favoured and death of the down-trodden is a Darwinian process. This means that languages die an unnatural death when they are deprived of facilities and privileges. The speakers of a dead language realize this injustice one day or another. It is because of such injustice done to different languages that different nations have experienced malicious movements, devastating civil wars and bitter bloodsheds in the history of mankind. If we are genuine Nepali citizens, we have to save our New Nepal from such catastrophes before it is not too late.

Thus, the main problem in New Nepal is how to save the endangered languages of Nepal indiscriminately. The term 'indiscriminately,' however, does not mean that all of the endangered languages of Nepal must have the same status as the Nepali language, the language giant of Nepal. No one has ever had a dream of this kind and this kind of futile dream is not possible and no speakers of endangered languages have ever wanted to have a dream of expelling the Nepali language, which has become so near and dear to everybody, from its national dominance. What the native speakers of endangered languages of Nepal have wanted is that, at least, their mother tongues must survive in New Nepal so that Prithvi Narayan Shah's sweet and democratic dream of making Nepal a beautiful



garden of four complexions and thirty six castes may come true. What these marginalized ethnic groups have not wanted (I believe) is that if only one language thrives and the rest wither in Nepal, this nation will turn out to be a desert of four complexions and one caste, and this horrible Nepal will be nothing more than a frightening Nepal haunted by the horrible ghosts of more than hundred murdered languages of this nation. No one wants to see New Nepal as a haunted horrible Nepal in the postmodern world.

It is often propagated that it is never possible to save all of the endangered languages in a multilingual country like Nepal because multilingual/poly-lingual language policy is practically impossible to implement. Even a bilingual or trilingual language policy can save only two or three languages, let alone hundreds of endangered languages. Even more horrible conclusion is that even if we declare two or three languages as optional official languages of a provincial government (bilingual/trilingual language policy), the most powerful language will, in course of time, kill the weak ones and there again emerges a monolingual situation. I am pretty sure that no one is bold enough to cast a doubt on the truth of these arguments because Darwin's theory of natural selection holds everywhere in this planet.

However, there is nothing impossible in this world if one wishes and believes in the alleged sayings of Napoleon Bonaparte, the greatest military genius of the 19<sup>th</sup> century France, that the word 'impossibility' is found only in the dictionary of a fool. I contend that it is only a monolingual language policy that can save a language, and the same monolingual policy which is being used to save the Khas Nepali language for more than two centuries must be adopted to save the endangered languages as well, but in a slightly different way. This different or modified monolingual language policy of mine involves unnatural selection (which is against Darwin's natural selection) and the use of the utility theory of economics in the local level. By resorting to an unnatural selection, we can select the languages that are endangered (which are out of the category of Darwin's natural selection) and the utility theory of economics can be used to make them useful in the local level to save them by declaring the majority marginalized languages the official language of a provincial government and the minority marginalized languages that of a village development committee (henceforth: VDC) office (a monolingual language policy in a state or in a VDC, not in the whole of the nation as the Khas Nepali language is) or declaring them simply a language of qualification. This language policy will apply for different vernacular languages of Nepal including different Khas Nepali dialects in Western Nepal. In the national level, however, the dominant Nepali language will be used as the

lingua franca in the whole of the nation and the only official language for the central government.

I argue that the above mentioned unnatural selection and utility theory can prove to be miraculous medical tablets and vital vaccinations against the Darwinian cancer of endangered languages. I want to put this conclusion of mine to the superior judgement of my honourable readers, namely the politically appointed policy making don linguists of Nepal. Any counter-arguments with robust evidence and convincing explanations from them are highly expected and the counter-arguments (if convincing and robust) will be publicly accepted.

### **Language Endangerment in Nepal**

A language is said to be endangered when its native speakers start decreasing in number. When its speakers stop speaking and understanding it, the language is said to be dead. Hock (1991: 530) says:

Language death commonly does not take place suddenly, within just one generation. Rather, it is a slow process which may extend over more than three generations. Its basis is bilingualism of a sort where a non-native language is considered more prestigious or useful, or may be required in certain contexts (such as school or dealing with governmental authorities).

In the beginning, there appear ‘semi-speakers,’ who fluently understand even their grandparents’ speech, but are unable to speak the language themselves. When this generation of semi-speakers dies, the language goes to its grave too.

It is often pointed out that vernacular languages of Nepal are threatened with extinction by the state sponsored Khas Nepali language, and the language is therefore portrayed as a ‘killer language’ by some language activists (e.g. Rai 2005: 84; van Driem 2007: 339). No one doubts the truth of this blame, but the case of the Terai is slightly different. In the Terai region where a handful of Nepali speaking migrants live, the vernacular languages there are threatened by Hindi, not by Khas Nepali. In a very few Terai districts like Jhapa, due to the exodus of hill migrants the indigenous communities like Mech, Koch and Dhimal are outnumbered by the hill people, the Nepali language is dominant. Of twenty districts in the Terai, it is only in Jhapa, Morang, Chitwan, Nawalparasi and Kanchanpur that Khas Nepali is the dominant language (see Bandhu 1993: 83-84). In the rest of the Terai districts, the Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avadhi and Tharu language occupy the first position.

In Himali and mid-hill regions where the settlement of Khas Nepali speakers is dense, many languages are going extinct due to the dominance of Khas Nepali. Of twelve Himali districts, it is only in Rasuwa, Manang and Mustang that Nepali is pushed back to the second position by the Tamang, Gurung and Sherpa language respectively. Of forty three mid-hill districts, it is only in Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Makwanpur and Baitadi that the Newari, Tamang and Baitadeli dialect of Nepali respectively occupy the first position (see Bandhu 1993: 82-83). Nepali can thus be said to be endangering the vernacular languages of fifty three districts of Nepal. In fifteen districts of the Terai, Hindi, an official language of India, is likely to be the killer language.

### **Causes of Language Endangerment**

What endangers a language? Some Khas Nepali academicians claim that many local languages are on the way to extinction simply because their speakers do not use their languages in their everyday speech. This is their own fault, not that of the state. They urge the speakers of these languages to use their mother tongues in order to save them just like the Khas do to save the Nepali language. This is a highly non-academic argument because these academicians either do not know or pretend not to know why the speakers of endangered languages are obliged to abandon their own mother tongues in favour of Nepali.

According to Aryal (2003), the Limbu youth have forgotten their mother tongue because of the study of 'expansive' English- the global language (p. 33), but even a layman knows that the Limbu youth, who have forgotten their mother tongue, speak not English, but Nepali. If we follow Aryal's line of argument, we would be obliged to say that the Limbu have abandoned their mother tongue in favour of Nepali due to the study of English. How could one abandon his mother tongue in favour of Nepali if he studies English? Aryal's (2003) explanation for the endangerment of vernacular languages in Nepal must therefore be rejected as nonsense.

According to van Driem (2007), the survival of individual languages is primarily determined --- by economic, ecological and demographic factors affecting the individual language communities. The success of one language in out-competing another has little or, in some cases, nothing to do with its grammatical propensities or lexical richness and refinement. Instead, the extinction of a language is a function of the histories of peoples, regions and

language communities' (p. 303). This explanation of language endangerment is obscure. Van Driem probably means that socio-economically weak and small communities assimilate to socio-economically strong and larger communities ('often more exploitative groups'). For example, he says, 'All Munda language communities are under heavy demographic and socio-economic pressure to assimilate linguistically to the local Indo-Aryan majority languages' (p. 307). Even more obscure is his speculation that the construction of roads into indigenous areas is endangering indigenous languages (p. 326).

Some oft-quoted reasons for language endangerment are as follows:

*Migration:* It is true that migration of people to other parts of the world causes the death of their language for they shift to the language of the locality they migrate to. But this explanation cannot account for the endangerment of the languages of the sedentary ethnic groups, who have not abandoned their homeland.

*Inter-marriage:* Another factor often pointed out (e.g. Kansakar 2009) is inter-marriage. The Westerners are notorious for inter-marriage. If intermarriage had been one of the causes of language death, Western languages would have gone to the dogs long ago. If an English boy marries an uneducated Nepali damsel, do the English husband and the Nepali wife shift to another language intelligible to both of them and kill the English and Nepali language? Definitely not! The Nepali girl is obliged to learn English, no matter how gradually. If a Limbu marries a Tamang girl, don't they shift to Nepali? The claim that intermarriage is a factor for language endangerment is therefore untenable.

*Education:* It is also claimed that education is one of the factors that can endanger a marginalized language. 'At a Tibeto-Burman workshop held at the University of California at Santa Barbara on 28 July 2001, the Newar scholar Daya Ratna Shakya went as far as to proclaim that "the more educated the Newar, the less likely he is able to speak Newar." This is a damning observation...' (van Driem 2007: 328). This observation has a grain of truth in it. It is only in the areas where children are not educated or least educated, mother tongue speakers are found in abundance. This situation has given rise to a serious problem of the type 'Be educated and kill your mother tongue, or remain uneducated and save your mother tongue!'

But we want to be educated and at the same time we want to save our mother tongues. Ironically, however, there are so many educated people whose mother tongue is Nepali, but why is their language Nepali not threatened with extinction? The English people are considered to be the most educated people in the world, but why is their language (the English language) not endangered? It is really a very damning observation that the above Newar scholar has no idea about why the educated Newars are abandoning their mother tongue in favour of Nepali. Why not excavate the solution to this problem?

*Loss of Language Loyalty/Negative Attitude:*

‘आफू ह्या “गोपी कृष्ण कौ” भनेर मान्छेको मिठो भाषा बोली रा’बेला तँ तेरो नमिठो मातृभाषाबाट भ्याउँ भ्याउँ गरेर मलाई के डिस्टर्ब गरिरा’नि । चुप लाग् ’ भनेर सुगाले भ्याउँकिरीलाई भ्रुपारेको मात्र के थियो, भ्याउँकिरीले पनि तुरुन्तै जवाफ दियो, ‘सुगा दाई, तपाईंले मान्छेको बोली बोलेपनि, मान्छेले खाने मिठो खाना खाएपनि तपाईं आफ्नो भाषामा बोलेको बुझ्नुहुन्न । मान्छेको बोली बोल्दाबोल्दै आफ्नो मातृभाषा बिर्सिसक्नुभयो । मेरो आवाज तपाईंलाई नमिठो लाग्ला, तर मेरी आमाले सिकाउनुभएको भाषा यहि हो । तपाईंले “गोपी कृष्ण कौ” भनेको ’ तपाईंकि आमाले बुझ्नुहुन्छ ?’ भ्याउँकिरीको यस्तो खरो जवाफ सुनेपछि अर्काको भाषा बोल्नमा गर्व गर्ने सुगा लाजले भुत्तुकै भएछ र त्यो दिनदेखि उसको मुखको रंग रातो भएछ ।

(सुगाको मुख रातो, शिक्षक माशिक, वर्ष ३, पूर्णांक २७, पाना ३, चिनीयाँ रेडियोको हिन्दी कार्यक्रमको वेबसाइट <http://hindi.cri.cn> बाट साभार र सम्पादित)

[‘Shut up! Why the hell are you disturbing me by speaking your cacophonous mother tongue at the time I am speaking in the sweat language of human beings?’ A parrot, who was singing *gopi krisna kau* “who is Gopi Krishna” in human language, blew up at a cricket, who was singing *jhyau jhyau* in his mother tongue. ‘Although you speak the sweat language of human beings and eat delicious food that human beings eat, you cannot understand your own mother tongue. While speaking human language, you have forgotten your mother tongue. My language may sound cacophonous to you, but this is the language my mother taught me. Does your mother understand your song *gopi krisna kau*?’ replied the cricket. When the parrot, who was proud of speaking other people’s languages, heard such a reply, he felt

humiliated and blushed with shame and since then a parrot's mouth has gone red ('Why is a parrot's mouth red?' *Teacher Monthly* 3(27): 3, retrieved from <http://hindi.cri.cn>)]

कोही हिन्दी भन्दछन्, कोही बङ्गाली, म भन्दछु, नीला पहाडहरुको प्राकृतिक भाषा, भर्नाहरु घुसेका मीठा लवज, हिमालयको भल्का पसेका शब्द, अमरवल्लरीहरु ढल्केको बाइमात्रा चराचुरुङ्गीसँग उड्ने र बोल्ने अक्षरहरु । मेरो भाषा ज्यादा नफैलेको होस, तर मेरो इन्द्राणीको भर्ना यही हो (महाकवि लक्ष्मी प्रसाद देवकोटा, के नेपाल सानो छ ?)

[Some say that it is Hindi, some others Bengali, but I say that it is the Nepali language that is sweet and natural. This is the natural language of blue mountains. This is the language embroidered with the euphonic sounds of cascades, with the alphabets embroidered with the beauty of the Himalayas, with the alphabets that wind up like creepers and speak and fly like birds. My language has not thrived much, but this language is really a rainbow shining over a cascade (The poet laureate late Laxmi Prasad Devkota in his 'Is Nepal Really Small?')]

'Why the hell are you learning Irish, your useless mother tongue?' said an English man. The Irish said, 'It will help me to converse with my dead ancestors when I go to the heaven after my death.' 'What if you go to the hell?' The English man asked the Irish irritatingly. 'Well, I know your mother tongue English, which will do very well if I go to the hell,' replied the Irish nationalist (Amrit Yonjan-Tamang, p.c.). This Irish story is an extreme example of language loyalty and reflects the best attitude towards one's mother tongue. Another example is 'the linguistically inspired strife or even violence' in Belgium (Hock 1991: 491). There are mainly two language communities in Belgium: Dutch speaking community and French speaking one. If you go to a cafe in a Dutch speaking area and ask for a cup of coffee in French, they will hate you and will not serve you coffee. You will encounter the same problem if you go to a French speaking community and speak in the Dutch language.

The poet laureate Laxmi Prasad Devkota's pride on the Nepali language and the story of why the parrot's mouth has gone red in the above cited texts are mild examples of language loyalty and reflect positive attitude towards one's mother

tongue. Another mild example would be represented by Wilson, an American Indigenous writer, who says, 'We are obliged to learn the White's language (English) in order to survive, but we have to know our mother tongue in order to live for ages (cited in Yonjan-Tamang 2006: 55). In the first half of the sentence, Wilson points out that, because of the usefulness of the English language, we cannot do away with it and we are obliged to use and save this language of the White. In the second half of the sentence, the writer is emotional and expresses his love for his mother tongue, which has no practical value and is going to be deserted by its own speakers.

An Austrian who was over proud of his mother tongue, in trying to demonstrate the superiority of his mother tongue to members of two other nations, said this: 'You Hungarians call water *viz*, you Italians *acqua*, but we call it *Wasser*, and we do not only call it so. It really is *Wasser*' (cited in Nehring 1950/51: 5). We also hear some Nepali language loyalists call the Nepali language 'the great language,' 'the only language that can serve as the formula for unifying diverse ethnic groups in Nepal,' 'the only "neutral" language,' 'the first documented language or the oldest language' and so on, and rebuke English for corrupting the Nepali language (Curiously, these Nepali nationalists never notice the Nepali language corrupted by Hindi, spoken mainly in North India, imported via Bombay-based films! In fact, they seem to be proud of the influence!). Such statements are nothing more than mere expressions of language loyalty.

On the other hand, many ethnic groups such as the Limbus feel ashamed of speaking their mother tongue but feel proud of speaking languages like Nepali. Some even feel proud of speaking Hindi or English. Such people are said to be disloyal to their language and are said to have negative attitude towards their mother tongue. It is often argued that disloyalty and negative attitude towards one's language leads to endangerment of vernacular languages. No people develop negative attitude towards their mother tongue for no reasons. The reason needs to be investigated.

#### *Dominance of a Majority Language:*

One day a cat chased a rat, which narrowly escaped into his hole. The rat said, 'I am really a very clever fellow, if I have to say so myself.' Just then he heard 'Arf! Arf!' and the scream of the cat out in the living room. 'Oh boy! Oh boy! The dog is after the cat!' The rat scampered out of his hole to see the cat bitten by a dog.

All of a sudden, WHAM! The rat found himself between two paws of the cat. 'Oh no! How can this be? I heard the bark of a dog and the scream of the cat.' Smiling and looking down at the rat, the cat said, 'It pays to be bilingual, you know' (Lohani & Adhikary, *The Magic of Words*, p. 19).

It is often pointed out that the speakers of a minority language shift to the majority language in their locality. For example, in the Kathmandu valley, the Tirthutiya Brahmins who are said to have migrated to the valley some five hundred years ago were bilingual in the beginning, i.e. spoke their mother tongue Maithili as well as Newar. But now they are well-versed in Newar, and have abandoned their mother tongue Maithili. Thus, in bilingual situations, it appears that the minority language is likely to meet its doom due to the dominance of the majority language. But Limbu is the majority language in Limbuwan and Magar in Magarat. Why can't we see the minority language Nepali threatened in these areas? This problem is crying for an explanation.

### **Language and Power**

*Monolingual Language Policy as the Deadly Cancer of Marginalized Languages:* 'Language is a dialect with an army behind it,' so goes an old socio-linguistic proverb. 'Why is the Brahmin's language called a standard language and the working people's dialect?' asks Sapkota (2010: 212). The answer to this question is apparently 'power.' Power saves a language; disempowerment kills it. Standard Nepali, the official language of Nepal, was originally a dialect of Nepali spoken in the Gorkha district of Nepal, and was the dialect of the ruling class (see Khadka (2009: 90)). The language was, in the past, called *Gorkha bhasa* 'the language of Gorkha.' The name *Gorkha bhasa* was later changed by Chandra Samser Rana into *Nepal bhasa* 'Nepali language' (see van Driem 1995):

In de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw veranderde Jang Bahadur Rana de naam van de khas kura in Gorkhali ---. In 1905 veranderde Candra Samser Rana de naam van de Gorkhali taal in Nepali (In the second half of the nineteenth century Jang Bahadur Rana changed the *Khas kura* 'Khas language' into *Gorkhali* ---. In 1905 Candra Samser Rana changed the name *Gorkhali* language into *Nepali*).

This is a fact, not an attack on the Nepali language.



According to *Satapatha Brahmana* (3.2.1.23-24), there is no need to learn the language of the barbarians (the *Asuras* or *Mlechhas*). One has to learn the language of the civilized, i.e. the Sanskrit language of the Brahmins. An obvious implication of this *mantra* is that the language of the victor must be learnt whereas that of the victim must be rejected, or excluded from a multilingual society. The mantra of *Satapatha Brahmana*, i.e. the concept of central vs. marginal/peripheral language, curiously turned out to be the main slogan of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's European structuralism and spread all over the globe in the form of the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism as quickly as the 'Saddam Hussain virus' and 'I-love-you virus.' As a result, monolingual language policies were made by the powerful ethnic groups in different countries by neglecting linguistic diversity and many 'non-standard' languages/varieties in the world were excluded from their natural use in the domain of oral communication (everyday speech). The consequence of such hegemonic language policies has been either death or imminent death (moribund state) of excluded languages in the post modern period.

The illegal relationship between language and power is confirmed by the fact that during the time of Persian occupation, Persian (a minority language but the language of the ruling class) was the state language of India (the then Mughal-an). When the British came into power in India, English (a minority but the language of the ruling British) became the national language of India. It is only when the British were disempowered and forced to leave India, Hindi enjoyed a national status. Dzongkha, which is 'native to just eight out of twenty one districts' (van Driem 2007: 311) is the national language of Bhutan simply because it is the language of the ruling Drukpas. Other examples of 'conquering languages' are Latin in the Roman Empire and English, French, Spanish in more recent colonial empires' (Hock 1991: 473). This explains, without a shred of doubt, that it is the mother tongue of the powerful ethnic groups that exists and that of the powerless is marginalized or endangered and goes extinct.

What is power? In the past power probably meant an army, but in modern times by power is meant the greatest number of representation in higher positions of government and policy making levels. It is often claimed by some fanatics that the so-called *janajatis* cannot get good positions in the Nepalese bureaucracy and the government simply because they are not intelligent enough. How about Bhutan? Are the majority of the people in Bhutan, who are Nepali speaking, not

intelligent enough to get jobs in government offices? Is it only the minority Drukpas, who are the ruling ethnic groups, intelligent enough to become judges, officers, ministers and kings? Thus, we have to agree with Luitel (2001) that the so-called *janajatis* have no strong hold in courts and policy making levels, as a result of which no appropriate language policies are made to save their mother tongues (p. 7).

Against this power theory of language endangerment, Pokhrel A (1998) claims that the Nepali language was declared the language of the nation, not because it was the victor's language, but because king Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, would consider Nepal 'the garden of four complexions and thirty six castes.' This means that King Prithvi Narayan considered all languages of Nepal to be equally important and it was unlikely for him to impose his mother tongue, i.e. Khas Nepali, as the state language of Nepal. This is an utter nonsense. He further says that the army of Prithvi Narayan Shah consisted not only of the Khas, but also Magar and Gurung soldiers. He asks us, 'Why didn't the Magar and Gurung language become the language of the nation?' This is a very unbecoming and obfuscating argument. Who is to be considered the victor: the ruler or his soldiers?

'If a victor's language were to be the language of the nation, why didn't the Muslims (Persians) and the British make their languages the language of the nation in India?' asks Pokhrel A (1998). No languages of India are declared the language of the nation even today. During the Persian (Mughal/Muslim) occupation, the official language of India (Mughalan) was Persian (the mother tongue of the ruling Muslims/Mughals). During the British rule, India used English as the official language and when the British left India the Hindi language became an official language of the country. Even a beginner in Indian history knows this fact. It is a shameful irony that a veteran linguist, a towering figure, the beginner of linguistic studies in Nepal, in fact the *Bhisma Pita Maha* of Nepalese linguistics, has gone blind to this fact, if not blindfolded.

Why the Nepali language was declared the language of the nation in Nepal then? According to Pokhrel A (1998), Nepali became the language of the nation simply because it is a popular language. How did the Nepali language become popular? Pokhrel A (1998) says, 'During the victory of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the fame of the Gorkha was spreading far and wide. As a result, everybody started liking the Nepali language spoken in the Gorkha district of Nepal' (p. 32).

Exactly, but what kind of argument is this? A victor's language cannot be the language of the nation on one page, but it can be so on the other page of the same book? The contradiction in Pokhrel A's (1998) argument does prove that a victor's language is very likely to become the dominant language of the nation. The book by Pokhrel is prescribed for the intermediate level (Major Nepali). What kind of lessons will the students get from this book?

Another Pokhrel B (1999) claims that the reasons for Nepali to become the language of the nation is that Nepali is a 'neutral language.' According to him, when people speak their mother tongues, they stink communal, but such a stink is absent when they speak Nepali because Nepali is a neutral language. He helplessly argues that Nepali became the language of the nation because, 'although the speakers of other languages have been living in Nepal for ages,' Nepali is the oldest language (?) or the only language with the oldest written documents. When stated explicitly, this line of argument rests on the demonstrably false premise that a language with written tradition is older than a language without a writing system.

Clark (1963/1977) and Abadie (1974) say that the Nepali language has come into contact with TB languages of Nepal for about eight hundred years. According to Clark (1963/1977), 'The earliest known document in Nepali is a royal deed of gift, and its date is AD 1356' (p. vii). Pokhrel A (1993) claims that the earliest document in the Nepali language is Damupal Bhupal's inscription at Dullu (the Sinja region of Nepal), which, he claims, dates back to 1038 Vikram era (corresponding to 981 AD) on the ground that the script used in the document is allegedly quite old. However, he says in his footnote that a large number of scholars are reluctant to accept this dating of the inscription. Secondly, what Pokhrel A (1993) means by 'old script' is not clear. Until this debate about the dating of this particular Nepali document is settled, we are obliged to say that the language with the oldest written document is Newar (12th/13th century) (see Pokhrel C 1993: 33). Pokhrel A (1993) says, on p. 146, that the written tradition of Nepali goes thousand years back, but on page 133 he paradoxically says, 'we are yet to investigate when the writing tradition began in the Nepali language.' Pokhrel B (1999) also claims that another reason for the Nepali language to become the language of the nation is that it is a language spoken by the majority. It is true that the majority of the Nepalese people speak this language now, but in

the past it was the language of a handful of the ruling class people in the district of Gorkha.

This line of argument is also advocated by Pokhrel C (1993). He claims that, on the basis of the Pali language in the Ashok pillar inscription of Lumbini (ca 3rd century AD), the Sanskrit language in Lichhavi inscriptions (ca 2-4 century AD) and the Khas Nepali language in Damupal Bhupal's Dullu inscription (ca 10th century AD?), etc., the Nepali speaking population (the Aryans) came to Nepal first and they were followed by the Tibeto-Burman people. Can we say that many ethnic groups in Nepal who are bereft of any written documents have not arrived in Nepal yet although we are living together with them since time immemorial?

These contradictory arguments prove that the Nepali language happened to be the language of the nation not because it was the oldest language in Nepal, or the language with the oldest written documents, but because it was the mother tongue of the people in power. Even if the Nepali language were the oldest language in Nepal, there is no reason why an old language should be the state language. If this had been true, Sanskrit would have been the state language of Nepal and India.

An honest linguist knows that a language does not die itself. It is the state that is responsible for killing the language. The state, which is dominated by the ruling class people, does so by making a monolingual language policy (see also Yonjan-Tamang 2006: 78), i.e. declaring the mother tongue of the ruling class the official language or the language of the nation or the medium of instruction, thereby rendering all other languages practically useless. In Nepal, the Nepali language enjoys this supreme status simply because the ruling Aryas adopted such a language policy. It is not unnatural for an ethnic group in power to impose its language on others. We can imagine that if the Limbu were the rulers of Nepal, they would do the same. What is important is that although it is natural for a powerful ethnic group to impose its mother tongue on others, it is unnatural to expel other languages.

Ironically, it is not possible to confer the official language status on all of the languages in a multi-lingual country like Nepal in order to save them because, according to the *competitive exclusive principle* in cultural ecology, 'complete competitors cannot exist' (Webster 1999: 563, citing Headland & Headland 1997: 87-89). It is also ironic that it is not possible for all ethnic groups to be equal in

power. The most powerful ethnic group's mother tongue, even if it is a minority language, is naturally selected as the state language. An apparent example is Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, which is 'native to just eight out of twenty one districts' (van Driem 2007: 311). But it does not mean that other languages must die or must be killed. For this reason, the government has to make such a radical language policy that other languages must also survive, go hand in hand with the dominant language, and make the nation a beautiful garden of the languages of four complexions and thirty six castes. If measures are not taken to protect other languages in time, then the monolingual language policy turns out to be the cancer of marginalized languages and the nation will be seen as a beautiful desert of four complexions and one caste.

Usually language policy makers make a monolingual policy to continue the dominance of the mother tongue of the ruling class in the pretext that linguistic diversity threatens national integrity. We can say to these policy makers, 'come out of your well and see the world around you and find if the survival of one language has threatened the existence of other languages at all!' Another pretext, as advocated in *Sathpatha Bramhana*, is that the language of the victor or civilized is more important than that of the victim. That is why such a language must be learnt. Last, but not the least, the language policy makers appointed by the government, no matter how well-intentioned their motives are, may not have any idea about how to save languages on equal basis. This may also be one of the reasons why a mono-lingual language policy was made in Nepal. We do not need any linguists to make such a policy. Even a layman knows how to save a language at the expense of others, i.e. by making a monolingual policy.

'In countries where there are more than one languages, there are often political implications in decisions that are seen to promote one group of speakers over another, and this is often referred to as language politics,' says Sapkota (2010: 208). It is language politics that determines what kind of language policy is to be made. According to Sapkota (2010), there are two kinds of language policy in the world: monolingual or autocratic language policy (which promotes only one language by murdering other languages) and multilingual or liberal or democratic language policy (which is 'designed to protect and promote regional and ethnic languages whose validity is threatened' (p. 209). Sapkota (2010) says that an example of a country with monolingual or autocratic language politics is Nepal (p. 208). In an article 'Why are our languages on the way to extinction?' in

an issue of *Gorkhapatra Daily*, Prof. Dr. Surya Subedi of University of London says, 'the current linguistic and cultural policy of Nepal is not minority language friendly and minority culture friendly.' He further says that politicians are engaged in a hot debate of forming different federal states, but they have not given any attention to the upliftment of the language and culture of the local people.

Curiously, Dhungel (2010) denies the existence of monolingual language policy in Nepal. According to him, 'Activists of various ethnic communities and political ideologies usually blame the rulers of Nepal for the long time suppression of the languages of ethnic minority communities by implementing a single language policy in the country. However, the historical reality is different. Except a couple of instances in the late Rana period and early Panchayat era of Nepali history, the rulers of Nepal were not very keen on such a policy. The royal orders and letters in Tibetan, Maithili, Hindi or Hindustani languages issued by various rulers of Nepal are examples of the absence of one dominant language and the suppression of minority languages by the former rulers of Nepal' (p. 180). This is a sheer lie. All of the red seals or black seals, as far as I know, in the Tibetan language issued in Limbuwan are by the Tibetan government, not by the Nepalese government or by the Gorkha. All of the red seals or black seals in the Maithili language are by the Sena rulers of Kirat, not by the Gorkha. I have no idea about any orders in the Hindustani or Hindi language issued by the Nepalese government.

Dhungel (2010) says that 'Historical evidence tells us that before the advent of Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, the Khasa-Parvate language or an earlier form of Nepali of today had been accepted as the state language and lingua-franca of various feudal states of Nepal. 'It was also not because of states' policy but because of the demand of that time' (p. 180). Why demand only the Nepali language at that time? I am pretty sure that Dhungel has no answer to this question. Even if he has, he wants to keep it secret. 'It was in fact the historical legacy of the Khasa Kingdom, which controlled a vast territory between Garhwal in the west and the Kathmandu Valley in the east.' Here he is bound to tell the truth that it is indeed the power of the Khas that was responsible for selecting the Khas language as the state language of Nepal. He further lies that 'It is surprising that not a single official order was issued against any minority languages within their domain' (p. 180). It is a great shame that he has no idea even about Aryal

and Joshi (1917 AD)'s recommendation at the time of the Rana rule and Pande's (1956 AD) recommendation at the time of the so-called democratic government rule after 1950 (see Language policies in Nepal below).

'It is important to note that Bhanubhakta's project of composing Nepali verses of Ramayana was not sponsored by the state and he himself didn't invest any money in advertising' (p. 181). This is true, but not an elegant defence. 'The appreciation for it (i.e. the Nepali language-TMA) happened on its own, due to the situation and time perhaps' (p. 181). What does this mean? What is the situation and time that demands the use of the Nepali language as the state language of Nepal? 'It was only during King Mahendra's Panchayat rule that the one language policy was officially adopted'(p.181). This is again a lie. He is humbly requested to read Aryal and Joshi's (1917) and Pandey's (1956) recommendations. 'However, the activists with vested political and communal interests time and again make baseless propaganda without any seriousness and thoughtfulness towards a possible social disorder and violence keep repeating the same misinterpretation of history' (p. 181). This is a totally unfounded argument and sounds nothing more than a childish persistence. It is crystal clear that it is Dhungel (2010) that is a real activist with 'vested political and communal interests' who is making futile attempts to cover up the truth. Such baseless arguments are highly unbecoming of a scholar like Dhungel, who is said to have done a Ph.D. on Asian languages and cultures from Columbia University (USA).

### Language Policies in Nepal

How did the spectre of language endangerment appear in Nepal? Language activists often blame the government for the emergence of such a situation. Let's now look at the different language policies adopted by the Nepalese government at different periods in the history of Nepal.

*During the Rana Democracy (1846-1950 AD):*

गोरखा भाषा (राज भाषा) को 'सारा गोरखा (नेपाल) राज्यमा अरु भाषाका भन्दा विशेष प्रचार पनि छ --- तापनि अझसम्म एक ही गोरखा भाषाको सर्वव्यापकता हुन सकेको छैन, किन्तु नेवार, भोटे, मगर, गुरुङ, लिम्बु, सुनुवार, दनुवार, थारु प्रवृत्तिका जंगली भाषाहरुले पनि आफ्ना जन्मस्थानलाई एकदम छान्न सकेका छैनन् । जहाँसम्म एक मात्र गोरखा भाषाले अरु सबै जंगली भाषालाई अर्ध-चन्द्र (गलहत्ती) लगाउनु, त्यहाँसम्म गोरखा भाषाको उन्नति हुन्छ भन्नु र मुख्य भाषा कहिन योग्य छ भन्नु केवल

मनो लड्डु मात्र हो ।' पसलमा नेवार र भोटे, लिम्बु, मगर, गुरुङ, दनुवार र मधिशे (कछाडिया) प्रभृति मानिसहरूले किनबेच गर्दापनि 'उनिहरूका जंगली-(असंस्कृत) भाषाबाट काम न चली ---- गोरखा भाषाकै शरण परी कार्य-सिद्ध गर्नु पर्दछ । त्यस्तै तमसुक, चिठी-पत्र प्रभृति लेख्नु पर्दा र अड्डा अदालत सम्बन्धी सरकारिया र दुनियाँदारी संपूर्ण काम काज गर्नु पर्दा पनि केवल गोरखा भाषा बाटै नै काम चलाउनु पर्दछ । ---- राज्य भरमा एकही गोरखा भाषा र एकही देवनागरी लिपिको मुख्य व्यवहार हुनाले सारा जातिका मानिसलाई कस्तो लाभ होला ? (अर्याल र जोशी १९७४ : १०-११)

During the Rana period (1846-1950 AD), in favour of the Khas Nepali language, 'different languages of Nepal were repressed and they were not given any chance to develop' (Bandhu 1993: 90) by the ruling Ranas. An apparent piece of evidence is Aryal and Joshi (1917 AD). Pointing out the importance of one's mother tongue and the relationship between a language and its speakers, under the title 'The benefit of having a single language throughout the kingdom,' Pundits Aryal and Joshi say (English translation of the above cited text):

There is more special publicity of the Gorkha language (the royal language) than other languages throughout the kingdom of Gorkha (Nepal).--- Yet the Gorkha language has not become as dominant and pervasive as expected. Savage languages like Newar, Bhote, Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Danuwar and Tharu have not abandoned their native lands. As long as the Gorkha language is not able to kick these savage languages out of their native lands, calling the Gorkha language the chief language is just like building a castle in the air and having a dream of its prosperity is nothing more than a daydream. The use of savage languages like Newar, Bhote, Limbu, Magar, Gurung, Danuwar and Madhise (Kachadiya) must be discouraged and that of the Gorkha language encouraged during the sale and purchase of things in shops. Everything including bonds, personal letters, official correspondences, etc. must be written only in the Gorkha language. What a great benefit will the only use of the Gorkha language and the Devanagari script throughout the kingdom bring to the whole of the people of the kingdom! (pp. 10-11).



*During the Post-Rana Multiparty Democracy (1951-1960 AD):*

नेपाली भाषा नै पढाइको माध्यम हुनु पर्दछ ... नेपाली भाषाबाहेक नेपालका अन्य भाषाको अध्ययनले नेपाली भाषाको प्रभावपूर्ण विकासमा बाधा दिनेछ , किनभने घरमा र समाजमा विद्यार्थीले नेपाली भन्दा अरु भाषालाई बढ्ता प्रयोगमा ल्याउने भएमा नेपाली एक बिरानु भाषा हुनेछ । यदि केटाकेटीहरुलाई प्रारम्भिक भाषाको रूपमा नेपाली नै सिकायो भने अरु भाषाहरु क्रमशः गौण हुनेछन्,’ ‘ नेपाली भाषा बाहेक अरु स्थानीय भाषा उपभाषालाई लडकाको जीवनसम्बन्धी मुख्य स्कूल र खेले मैदानबाट शीघ्रान्तिशिघ्र हटाउन आवश्यक छ (सरदार रुद्र राज पाण्डेको शिक्षा आयोग २०१३)

According to Bandhu (1993), after the downfall of the autocratic Rana democracy, there mushroomed a number of schools in the Nepal Terai, but Nepal did not have enough manpower. As a result, teachers were imported from India. These Indian teachers used Hindi as the medium of instruction. The Nepalese government made a language policy, according to which the Nepali language would be the medium of instruction from grade three onwards. This policy of the government of Nepal was opposed by the Terai Congress party. It was demanded that there be a separate Terai province and Hindi be the state language of the Terai (pp. 85). Bandhu (1993) says, ‘After the democratic change in 1950, there were democratic exercises but ---!’(pp. 90). This ‘but’ of Bandhu (1993) is a fact. Look at the following report of Education Commission led by Rudra Raj Pande. Pandey’s (1956) democratic report undemocratically recommended that Nepali be used as the medium of instruction in Nepal. Look at the following English translation of the above cited text.

The Nepali language must be the medium of instruction---. The study of languages other than Nepali hinders the proper development of the Nepali language because if students use their languages at home and in society Nepali will become an alien language. If children are taught Nepali right from elementary levels, other languages will be automatically marginalized. The use of languages other than Nepali must be strictly prohibited in schools and even in play grounds

Bandhu (1993) says that the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal 1958 declared Nepali as the language of the nation (pp. 83, 86). ‘Thus like their Rana

predecessors, the democratic government, too, favoured Nepali at the expense of many other languages spoken in the country' (Rai 2010: 18).

*During the Partyless Panchayat Democracy (1960-1990 AD):* The principle of the party-less Panchayat democracy was— one nation, one religion, one language in Nepal. One can easily imagine what kind of language policy was made during this period. National Education Committee 1961 continued not only the earlier language policy, but also made special provisions for Sanskrit education in Nepal. The committee said that arrangements would be made for free Sanskrit education up to the university level, and special 'pocket money' for Sanskrit students (Yonjan-Tamang 2006: 40).

*During the Post-Panchayat Multiparty Democracy (1990-2006 AD):* Bandhu (1993) says, '...it is only the constitution of 1990 that accepted multi-lingual Nepal' (p. 90), but it did not intend to save vernacular languages either. This is apparent from the fact that the demand to use local languages as an official language for local government offices, viz. the Maithili language for Dhanusa and Rajbiraj districts and the Newar language for the Kathmandu valley was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court's verdict. Practically, however, the verdict was justified. Having two official languages (one Nepali and the other Maithili/Newar) with unequal power in the same region is against the principle of science. According to Darwin's theory of natural selection, the powerful language will easily out-compete and kill the less powerful one. In a bilingual situation, there is therefore no sense in using a local language as an optional official language.

Comparatively, the constitution of 2047 BS (1990AD) 'seems liberal on the issue of the speech communities and their mother tongues, but does not speak about guaranteeing the support (physical and financial) for the speech communities for conducting schools for educating their children' (Thokar 2009: 348). This means that every community has been granted the right to save and promote its language, but at its own expense. How about Nepali and Sanskrit? The Nepali language is saved and promoted by the government by drawing millions and millions from the nation's treasure collected from the tax and revenues from all the Nepalese people. For the promotion of the dead language Sanskrit the government has been spending more than 72000000 rupees every

year. Isn't it a discrimination not to spend a penny to save live languages of Nepal? Such a democratic language policy only adds fuel to the fire of language movements.

### **The Question of Linguistic Human Rights**

Every linguistic community has the right to speak and save its language (UNESCO). 'Linguistic human rights --- are so inalienable that no state or person may violate them (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994)' (cited in Thokar 2009: 344). But 'To date, only the Nepali language has received maximum utilization of government facilities, resources, support and official and national identity' and thus violating what Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (1994) call 'linguistic human rights' of the speakers of vernacular languages. As a result, a vast majority of the vernacular languages of Nepal are being abandoned by their speakers in favour of the state sponsored Khas Nepali. To guarantee the linguistic human rights of different language communities, some measures must therefore be invented.

### **The Question of Linguistic Genocide**

A language 'does not die itself. The dominant language causes it to die. So, --- The dominant language happens to commit such a crime over the other indigenous and minority languages' (Thokar 2009: 345). Khas Nepali, the dominant language of Nepal, is killing many vernacular languages almost everyday and thereby committing what Skutnabb-Kangas's (2003) calls 'linguistic genocide' or 'linguicide.'

According to van Driem (2007), the Nepali language is considered a 'killer language' not only in Nepal, but also in Sikkim and parts of Bhutan, but ironically it is also 'threatening the archaic and divergent western dialects of Nepali itself,' i.e. the western dialects (pp. 339). To avoid linguistic genocide, therefore, we have to bring about a drastic change in the traditional language policy of Nepal.

### **Phallo-centric Fear of some Native Speakers of Nepali**

काठमाण्डौ महानगरपालिकाले नेपाल भाषामा पत्र व्यवहार गर्दैमा वा राजविराज नगरपालिकामा मैथिली भाषामा दैनिक कामकाज गर्दैमा नेपाली भाषा कमजोर हुन्छ भन्थान्नु हुन्न । ... अंग्रेजीलाई अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सम्पर्क भाषा बनाउँदै दशभिन्नको सम्पर्क

भाषा नेपाली र सम्बन्धित जातिका ब्यक्तिहरुका बीचमा बोलिने त्यहि जातिको भाषाको पनि उत्तिकै विकास हुनुले कसैलाई घाटा पुग्दैन। ... विभिन्न जनजातिहरुले आफ्ना भाषाको विकासका लागि राज्यबाट सहयोगको अपेक्षा गर्दा अपमानको घुटका पिउनुपरेको स्थिति लुकेको छैन । त्यहि भएर त राज्य प्रतिको मान्छेको आस्थामा ठेस लाग्दै जान्छ । त्यसले देशको एकिकृत भावनालाई सघाउ पुऱ्याउँदैन । ... एउटै पहिरन, एउटै भाषा र एउटै अनुहारका मान्छेमात्र हुनुभन्दा विविधतायुक्त देश हुनु हाम्रो सौभाग्य हो (भन्ने कुरा) लाई बुझ्न नसक्दा एक अर्का भाषा प्रति सद्भाव र विश्वासको सट्टा अविश्वसनीय वातावरण उत्पन्न हुन थालेको छ' ( लुईटेल २००९: ७) ।

[One should not think that the Nepali language goes to the dogs when the Newar language is used as an official language of the Kathmandu valley and the Maithili language in the Raj Biraj municipality. No one will be harmed if we use English as an international language, Nepali as the lingua franca of Nepal, and promote and develop the languages of other ethnic groups as well indiscriminately. --- When different ethnic groups expect some support from the state for the promotion and development of their languages, they have had to drink the opium of humiliation. Such treatment by the state is what makes people develop negative attitude towards the state. This cannot promote the sense of unity. It is our fortune to have diversity rather than a single language, single dress and single face. Due to the inability of the state to understand the importance of diversity, different ethnic groups have started feeling a sense of distrust towards one another's language (Luitel 2007: 7)]

पाँचथर महोत्सवपछि घर फर्किँदा बैरागी दाइको पुख्र्यौली घर पाँचथरको पौवा सारताप निस्कने परियो । उनीचाहिँ गाडिमा जान डराउने, हामीचाहिँ हिँडेर जान डराउने । हिँडेर जाँदाजँदै बाटामा एकजना बूढी तामाङ महिलासँग भेट भयो । कति धेरै वर्षपछि भेट भएको हो कुन्नि ? बैरागी दाइले चिर परिचीत आफ्नो दौतरी तामाङ महिलालाई जिस्क्याए— तामाङ भाषामा । ति तामाङ महिलाले उतर फर्काइन तर लिम्बु भाषामा । वहाँहरुको निकैबेर सम्म वार्तालाप चल्यो । बैरागी दाइ तामाङभाषामा बोल्ने, तामाङ महीला लिम्बु भाषामा बोल्ने । अरुको मातृभाषाप्रति यो कस्तो सम्मान ? यो कस्तो सह-अस्तित्वको भावना ? धेरै अनौठो लाग्यो मलाई

। तर म आफैँ भने तामाङ भएरपनि आफ्नो मातृभाषा नजान्ने ! यो कस्तो  
विडम्बना ? (कवि कृष्ण भूषण बल)

[After the Pachthar Festival, when we were on our way back home, we decided to drop in onto Bairagi Kainla's ancestral home at Pauwa Sartap of Panchthar District. He was afraid of going there by his vehicle, but we were afraid of going there on foot. Ultimately, we gave in to his decision and started walking. On the way we happened to meet an old Tamang woman of Bairagi's age. Bairagi talked to her, but in the Tamang language. The woman talked to him but in the Limbu language, the mother tongue of Bairagi. What great respect for one another's language! What a sense of co-existence! But as to myself, I do not know my mother tongue Tamang. What a shame! What an irony! I feel pity for myself (poet and academician late Krishna Bhushan Bal of Biratnagar)]

Some fanatic linguists and a portion of linguistically unschooled mass whose mother tongue is Khas Nepali fear that if local languages are declared official languages of their regions, the Nepali language, their mother tongue, will lose its national status. By hook or by crook, they pressure the government to declare Khas Nepali the language of the nation again. They fear that if other languages survive, the Nepali language will go to the dogs. This is simply an unfounded fear- a fear that arises solely from an imaginary tiger, not from a real one. The people who belong to this camp even try to distort the definition of *mother tongue* and say that the mother tongue of a huge number of the children of indigenous nationalities is also Nepali because they speak Nepali right from the beginning for their parents have already abandoned their mother tongues in favour of Nepali. It appears that these scholars either do not know or pretend not to know that Nepali is these children's father tongue, not their mother tongue.

In defence of continuing the dominance of the Nepali language, some scholars like Prof. Bal Krishna Pokhrel claim that Nepali is not the mother tongue of any one, but it is a common language of all the Nepali people. Even a layman knows that it is the mother tongue of the Nepali Aryas and has been made the common language of all Nepali by adopting monolingual language policy in the nation. Some scholars even go to the extent of saying that Nepali is an international language because it is spoken in different parts of the world, e.g. Sikkim, Bhutan,

India, Gulf countries, Europe, America, etc., by the Nepali people who are there. It is a childish, if not a ridiculous, argument. If this definition of 'international' is true, then one may say that Limbu is also an international language because it is spoken by the Limbu living in Sikkim, Bhutan, India, Hongkong, Gulf countries, Europe, America, etc. If we agree with the above definition of 'international,' we may be obliged to say that all the languages of the globe are international. Don't people burst into laughter to hear this definition of 'international'?

There are very few scholars like Pokhrel (1993: 53) and Luitel (2001) who say that the development of a language cannot be a hindrance to the development of another. It is therefore useless to talk highly of the Khas Nepali language unnecessarily with the purpose of repeating its monopolistic dominance in the nation again.

#### **The Attitude of the State: Monkeys more Important than Men**

What kind of language policy is to be made depends upon the attitude of the government towards the endangered languages. Out of ignorance or on purpose, the state appears to be indifferent to the question of the protection of Nepalese languages other than Khas Nepali and Sanskrit. As we have already seen above, prior to the restoration of democracy in 2046 Vikram era (1989 AD), the language policy adopted by the state was suppressive. The constitution of 2047 VE (1990 AD) was slightly liberal in that it granted the right to conserve and promote a community's language, script and culture, but at the community's own expense.

How about Khas Nepali and its ancestral language Sanskrit? Khas Nepali has been declared the language of the nation and provided every facility by the government. Sanskrit education is heavily funded by the state and Sanskrit students, who are mainly Bramhans, receive excessive facilities from the state. But other languages, the so-called 'national languages,' are deprived of any facilities whatsoever and are dying everyday. Why the discrimination? The ban on the use of Newar as an official language of the Kathmandu valley and Maithili as that of Dhanusa and Rajbiraj districts exposes the inner motive of the so-called democratic government.

In reference to the protection of endangered languages, Bairagi Kainla says in an interview that there is a hue and cry when a crocodile or a rhino dies in Nepal, but the government remains untouched when so many human languages of Nepal

are dying everyday. Recently, a great concern was shown about the death of mischievous monkeys in the Pashupatinath region due to the consumption of the polluted water of the Bagmati River and the news was broadcast on radios for two days. A few days later, there was the news of the death of some tigers in Chitwan National Park. The government immediately announced the budget of 2,00,000 rupees to save tigers. Ironically, the Nepalese government turns a deaf ear to the news of endangered languages that are dying a dog's death. That the news of so many dying languages of Nepal cannot be important for the rulers of Nepal can be easily envisaged from a stupid decision they made during the time of the Maoists' insurgency. The Maoists were fighting against the government on ethnic, gender and language issues. Hundreds and hundreds of people were dying everyday in the conflict, but the Nepalese government did not consider it a serious problem. What it considered the biggest problem in Nepal at that time was that of making love to one's wife. The government seriously passed a bill, according to which, before making love to his wife in the midnight a husband must hold a serious talk with his wife (and perhaps write a letter of application too!) for her consent, otherwise the act of love making will be considered a rape, and the criminal husband will be seriously punished. Such lack of seriousness on the part of the government added fuel to the fire of the so-called people's war and ultimately the traditional political parties had to give in to the Maoists' demand.

Bairagi Kainla says in a speech that the Limbu language is thriving in Sikkim, but in its own homeland (Nepal) the language is on the verge of extinction. The reason is very simple. According to him, the government of Sikkim is in favour of saving all languages but the Nepalese government is not serious about them. In fact, it is in favour of kicking them out. The attitude of the government in Republic Nepal ('New Nepal') appears to have slightly changed. This is clearly reflected by the provisions explicitly stated in the Interim Constitution 2007. The constitution accepts the use of a local language as the (?) official language of the local government. This is definitely a bold step, but yet to be seen in practice.

### **Exclusion, Expulsion and Explosion: Language Movements and their Problems**

नेपालभित्रका कुनै जनजातिको भाषा मर्योभने संझनुपर्छ, एउटा सभ्यता नै मर्यो ।  
 --- भाषा विकासको कुरा गर्दा स्थानीय निकायले जनजातिका भाषालाई

कामकाजको भाषा बनाउन खोज्दा त्यसलाई अदालतमा पुर्‍याई रद्द गर्ने प्रवृत्तिलाई बहुभाषी मुलुकमा बस्नेको सहिष्णुता भन्न मिल्दैन ।---विभिन्न जनजातिहरुले आफ्ना भाषाको विकासको लागि राज्यबाट सहयोगको अपेक्षा गर्दा अपमानको घुट्का पिउनु परेको स्थिति लुकेको छैन । त्यहि भएर त राज्यप्रतिको मान्छेको आस्थामा ठेस लागेर जान्छ ।--- एउटै पहिरन, एउटै भाषा र एउटै अनुहारका मान्छेमात्र हुनुभन्दा विविधतायुक्त देश हुनु नेपालीहरुको भाग्य हो (भन्ने कुरा) लाई बुझ्न नसक्दा एक अर्का भाषाप्रति सदभाव र विश्वासको सट्टा अविश्वासनीय वातावरण उत्पन्न हुन थालेको छ । लुईटेल २००९: ७०)

[If the language of an ethnic group dies, we should think that a civilization dies. --- As to the promotion and development of vernacular languages, the decision to use some of them as an official language of their native regions has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court's verdict. This is nothing more than zero tolerance in a multi-lingual country like Nepal. --- When different ethnic groups expect some support from the state for the promotion and development of their languages, they have had to drink the opium of humiliation. Such treatment by the state is what makes people develop negative attitude towards the state. This cannot promote the sense of unity. It is our fortune to have diversity rather than a single language, single dress and single face. Due to the inability of the state to understand the importance of diversity, different ethnic groups have started feeling a sense of distrust towards one another's language (Luitel 2007: 7)]

In a multi-lingual country like Nepal, neglecting other languages means excluding them from the family of Nepalese languages. Neglecting them further means expelling them. This expulsion of fellow languages ultimately results in explosion. History is a witness that there have been a number of language movements in Nepal. To take a couple of examples, in the 1990s, Joint Committee for Language Rights in Nepal launched a movement demanding that the Newar language be declared an official language of the Kathmandu valley and the Maithili language that of Dhanusa and Rajbiraj districts of the Terai, in addition to the already existing official language Nepali. This demand of some Maithili and Newar nationalists was rejected by the Supreme court's verdict in



1999. The day on which the verdict was made public was declared Black Day by language activists.

In 2010, Kirat Workers' Party, an underground party of Eastern Nepal, hanged a bomb on the gate of a Sanskrit institution at Dharan in protest against the Sanskrit education in Nepal, which is heavily funded by the government (720000000 rupees annually, according to the news published in *Rajdhani Daily*, Wednesday, 3 July 2002). Kirat Workers' Party, joined by Janjati Mahasangh, a grand federation for indigenous nationalities and ethnic minorities, made public that the rulers of Nepal have been making heavy investment for the promotion of a dead language like Sanskrit, but not a penny for saving spoken languages of Nepal, which are going extinct everyday. These language activists demanded that in all Sanskrit institutions local languages be also taught. Nepal Sanskrit University appears to be positive towards this demand, and appears to be preparing to convert Sanskrit institutions into poly-technique or multi-lingual schools. Unless a proper language policy is made in time, mild looking language movements are likely to continue and keep disturbing the peace of Nepal.

However, there is a serious problem surrounding different language movements. In India, the Tamils rebelled against the dominance of Hindi and boycotted the study of Hindi in their schools at Tamilnadu but later they were obliged to learn Hindi and include Hindi as an optional subject in their school curriculum (Jivan 2011: 7). This means that the Tamils were right in their rebellion but wrong in making a language policy. The wrong Tamil policy resulted simply from the fact that all linguists are not language activists and all language activists are not linguists. Similar is the fate of language activists in Nepal. Agitating parties appear to launch movements without any clear-cut and scientific roadmap as to how their endangered languages can be saved. For example, the use of Newari and Maithili as an additional official language of Kathmandu and Dhanusa/Rajbiraj respectively cannot save these endangered languages because the state sponsored Nepali, the language giant of Nepal, easily out-competes these local languages and ousts them in no time.

Other problems come from the state. In the first place, the government does not seem to be willing to fulfill the demands of language activists. Secondly, the demands being unscientific the government may not have fulfilled the demands in haste. Thirdly, the government appears to have no idea about how all marginalized languages can be saved properly and indiscriminately.

### **Wrong Language Policy and its Fatal Consequences**

We have seen Sri Lanka (old name Ceylon) plunge into devastating darkness of civil war and bloodshed due to discriminatory language policies. The majority (Sinhalese) wanted to impose their language on the minority Tamils, who, on the other hand, wanted to save their minority language by demanding its mandatory use in one way or the other in their state. We have seen the bitter experience of the Bhutanese Nepalis, who are living a dog's life in different refugee camps in Nepal. The royal government of Bhutan imposed the minority language Dzongkha, the language of the ruling class, on the majority Nepali speaking population by implementing the new Citizenship Act of 1985. Many of the Nepali speaking population in Bhutan defied this royal decree. Consequently, they were tortured, killed and driven out of the country. 'To speak Nepali and follow the Nepalese culture turned out to be a great curse to the Nepali speaking population of Bhutan.' History is a witness to the fact that East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan (current Pakistan) and re-christened itself as Bangladesh. The reason was again a language issue (see also Jha 2011). East Pakistan was obliged to split Pakistan simply because she did not want its language go to the dogs.

If we wise Nepalis do not learn lessons from the horrible consequences of a wrong language policy experienced by our neighbors, Nepal's loss of peace in the future is pretty predictable. It deems, therefore, expedient to give a serious thought to saving marginalized languages of Nepal before it is too late. Everybody knows that Nepal experienced ten years of horrible war. One of the issues was, of course, language. According to Sapkota (2010), 'The both major and minor political parties of Nepal after 1990 hold almost similar views regarding languages in their election manifestos. But the situation of the country got changed slowly when Nepal Communist party Maoist took language as one of the major tools for its revolution after 2000' (p. 216). Therefore, unless measures are taken in time, the flame of language movements may flare up and assume the form of civil war and consume Nepal.

### **Why Save Endangered Languages?**

*भाषा हो सभ्यता हाम्रो सारा उदय, उन्नति  
जीत, वैभव भाषामै बाँच्छछन पछिसम्म यी ।*

(नाट्य सम्राट् बाल कृष्ण सम)

[Language is civilization, and the symbol of every progress; Language makes immortal every victory and every success (Playwright King Bal Krishna Sam, adapted from a newspaper article)]

इदमन्यतमः कृत्स्नं जायेत भूवन्त्रयम्  
यति शब्दावयं ज्योतिरासंसारं न दीप्यते

[Without words, i.e. language, do not go the whole of the three worlds (the heaven, this mortal world and the underworld) dark; nor does the whole of the universe shine without language (adapted from the above newspaper article)]

Theoretically, there are a number of reasons for saving a language some of which are as follows:

*Language and World View:* According to Sapirian linguistics, the world view of a community is reflected in its language. For example, a mountain in the *Kan-chen-ju-nga* range is called *Kumbhakarna* ‘a brother of Ravana in the Ramayana, who is believed to sleep for six months and wake up for six months’ in Nepali, but in the Limbu world view the mountain is seen as *phkta-lu* ‘shoulder-boulder.’ A herbal plant is called *tite-pat* ‘bitter-leaf (plant)’ in Nepali, but *nam-yoba* (scent?-masculine) ‘aromatic plant’ in Limbu. Thus, when a language dies, a kind of thought or a way of thinking dies too (see also Yadava 2008: 17). Saving a language means saving a thought or a worldview.

*Language and Culture:* Language and culture are so interrelated that the death of one leads to the death of the other. Killing a language means digging the grave of a culture too (see also Yadava 2008: 17). A Limbu who cannot speak his mother tongue cannot sing Limbu *palam*. If he cannot sing *palam* he cannot dance *dhan nach* (paddy dance), and hence the death of the Limbu folk dance. If a Limbu does not know the colloquial Limbu language, he cannot learn the classical language (*mundhum*). If he does not know the classical language, he cannot be a Limbu priest. If he cannot be a Limbu priest, who will perform Limbu rituals? Thus, when the Limbu language dies, the Limbu culture goes to its grave too because language is the ‘vehicle of culture’ (Yadava 2008: 18).

*Linguistic Ecology:* I have no good idea about linguistic ecology or eco-linguistics. However, the term ‘ecology’ is apparently borrowed from biology. Biological ecology deals with *ecosystem*– the system in which biotic (living beings) and abiotic factors (physical factors like sun, air, soil, water) interact and this interaction leads to the stable existence of the communities living in an environment. The communities include predators, consumers and decomposers. If one of the members of the community goes extinct, other members are equally affected and the whole ecosystem is disturbed and the environment turns into a desert.

Different languages mean different world views and different ethnic knowledge. Each ethnic world view and knowledge has its own importance in a society. Different world views and knowledge of different ethnic groups interact and contribute to the common benefit of a society. When one language is dead, one world view and knowledge is gone too. As a result, other language communities of the society are affected too. It is probably in this sense that the term *linguistic ecology* is used. No matter in what sense the term is used, it can be surmised that the death of one language disturbs the linguistic ecosystem of a multi-lingual community.

*Group Identity:* ‘For an individual and a community, mother and the mother tongue are equally respectable and worth saving. If mother dies, a child’s existence is not threatened, but if his mother tongue dies, the existence of the individual as well as that of the whole community goes to the grave because the only factor that keeps a community alive is his language and culture’ (Tripathi 2001: 7).

To take an example, van Driem (2007) reports that, ‘in Citvan Tharu, alongside *yankh* ‘eye,’ there exists a form *ted* ‘eye,’ reminiscent of the Manchad (Tibeto-Burman– TMA) form *tira* ‘eye’ (p. 339). If this example is not the result of a chance resemblance, we may speculate that the Tharus were originally Tibeto-Burman speakers. But ‘The Tharus have already abandoned their mother tongue and speak different dialects of the Aryan language’ (Pokhrel 1993: 36) like Maithili, Bhojpuri and Avadhi. Due to the loss of their language, they have lost their ethnic identity. This is the reason why some scholars call them Magars, some call them Kirats and some call them Aryas.

Please note that this is only the first half of the paper. In the forthcoming regular issue of this journal, the following sections, which contain the main ideas and formulations of the paper, will appear.

*12. Previous Attempts to Save Endangered Languages*

*12.1. Arousing a Sense of Language Loyalty and Positive Attitude*

*12.2. Mother Tongue Education*

*13. Types of Saving Languages*

*13.1.1. Vestigial Saving*

*13.1.11. Documentation*

*13.1.12. Use in Mass Media and Primary Education*

*13.1.2. Proper Saving: Use of the Language in Speech/Oral Communication*

*14. Saving Endangered languages: Unnatural Selection & Utility Theory*

*14.1. Official Language Formula*

*14.2. Language of Qualification Formula*

*14.3. Endangered Languages in Education: Three-to-Four Language Formula*

*14.4. Use of Endangered Languages in Practice and the fate of Sanskrit*

*15. Concluding Remarks*

Although a writer's best style is to keep his readers in suspense by not stating what is coming up next in advance, (by violating this code of conduct) I will succinctly summarize the contents of the forthcoming sections but keeping the most interesting details up my sleeves.

In the forthcoming sections, I argue against saving endangered languages by arousing a sense of language loyalty and mother tongue education. I talk about the types of saving languages, viz. incomplete saving and complete saving. I argue that documentation, use in mass media and primary education of an endangered language cannot save it completely. This kind of saving endangered languages is nothing more than saving Sanskrit via Sanskrit education in Nepal because documentation of a language is only a photograph and the use in mass media and primary education only an apparition of a language. To save a language completely, it must be put into use, either in writing or in speech. In order to use an endangered language in writing (paper works, etc.) and speech in the local level, it must be declared the official language of a state (if it is a majority local language), or of a VDC office (if it is a minority local language) or simply a language of qualification (if it is an extremely minor language like Kusunda). In order to accomplish this purpose, we have to revive the three language formula of education implemented since 1951 but abandoned a few years ago due to the Maoist insurgency. We can even introduce a four language formula of education) in the primary or secondary level as per the need. Such a policy of saving

endangered languages applies also for the archaic western dialects of Khas Nepali, which are being threatened by the state-sponsored dominant Khas Nepali.

Survival of endangered languages, however, does not mean expulsion or subordination of the dominant Khas Nepali language. The superior-most position of this language will be retained by using it as the lingua franca in the whole of the nation and the only official language for the central government.

#### Notes

1. The germ of the idea expressed in this paper was conceived while commenting on Dr. Govinda Bahadur Tumbahang's paper on language policy in New Nepal at a workshop held in Biratnagar. I expressed some of the idea when I was interviewed on a radio show called SPANDAN on Kantipur FM in 28 Mangsir 2067 VE (~ 2010 AD).
2. In this paper, I use the term 'Khas Nepali,' originally coined by Bairagi Kainla, interchangeably with the common term 'Nepali.'

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# **POLITICO ECONOMIC HISTORY OF MARGINALIZATION AND CHANGE AMONG THE MUSAHARS OF EAST-CENTRAL TARAI NEPAL<sup>1</sup>**

**Madhu Giri**

## **Abstract**

*Based on fieldwork, this article examines historical politico economic dimensions of marginalization, various aspects of land- labour relations, strategies of resistance and new social identification among the Musahars of Central East Tarai. Being landless Haruwa-Charuwa, wage labour and out of ritual roles of caste system, they were deprived from both mainstream socialization process of state through interaction with local government institutions and socialization through integrated caste system. Hidden transcripts and migration were employed as livelihood strategies as stated by James Scott (Scott 1985). James Scott, in his seminal work Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (1985), argued that socio economically weak people mostly applied hidden or 'off stage performance' to resist against marginalization. Theoretically, I refute his argument by presenting the case of the Musahar, a highly marginalized Tarai Dalit caste group of Nepal who seem to largely use public or 'on stage performance' to resist against marginalization. After political change of 1990 and 2006, political parties and civil society have become key players of the socio economic and political affairs from the local to national level. Traditional location and sources of power have been changed from land and caste to political parties and civil society. The effect of the change can be observed on change of resistance strategy of the Musahars from hidden to public performance. The recent changes observed nationwide in identity polity have hit the Musahars hard. As other groups applied new identification as a method for politico economic opportunity in the society, the Musahars, being highly marginalised in all arenas, started new social identity activism to overcome deeply rooted social exclusion.*

## **Introduction**

This article presents multi-dimensional marginalization process of the Musahars in the central-east Tarai. Socio economic status of Musahars culture is historically

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constructed through their political economic relationship with the state and non-state institutions. From being hunters in jungles and wandering at will, to becoming unfree labour to free labour; from being pagan (nature worshippers) to becoming untouchables within the Hindu caste system, Musahars appear to have undergone a complete ontological metamorphosis over the last few centuries. Their inclusion into the caste fold appears to be a result of the politico economic need for labour bank in the Jamindari system prevailed in both Bihar and Nepal. They were included in the untouchable category of caste system without specific ritual based caste occupation. Being socio-politically weakest and economically resource less group of the Tarai, Musahars deployed various strategies of livelihood. The quest of the article is how political economic system as well as process reproduced multi-dimensional marginalization of the Musahars through the history. Another intellectual hunch of the research is their changing responses from hidden transcripts to public transcripts and engagement in new social identity politics.

The Musahars are the second largest Tarai Dalits caste group, with a total population of 1,72,434 (CBS 2001), who inhabit scattered settlements in the Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusha, Sunsari, Morang, Udayapur, Mahotari, Bara, Parsa, Sarlahi, Rautahat and Nawalparasi districts of eastern and central Tarai Nepal. They are densely populated in Siraha and Saptari districts. Historically, their livelihood strategies have been closely attached to the land (soil cutting-formation of arable land, pond construction and agricultural labour) but unfortunately land ownership was detached from them. Socio-economically, more than 96.67% are landless wage labour (CEDA 2007). Their adult literacy rate (7.3%), female literacy rate (3.8%), life expectancy and position on human development indices are the lowest (Dahal 2010). Politically, their representation in decision making spheres of society is almost nil. Though Musahars are significant population size, they were neither elected nor nominated in Constitutional Assembly in 2008 and more than this none of them elected or nominated VDC chairperson (Giri 2012a).

The chance to see their face in bureaucracy and other government services is almost zero till now. At local level, they were neither in local media nor decision making positions of local NGOs and CBOs. Agricultural wage labour and seasonal migration to India were main traditional strategies of livelihood. They recently focused on brick factory, construction, carpentry and third world labour migration for better livelihood. This article digs out political economic history of

marginalization and recent changes among the Musahars of Siraha. How did the Musahars end up to landless wage labour? In other term, who are the Musahars and how have they been changing with the politico economic characteristics of the state? How did state authorize institutions to push them at the bottom of social ladder?

New Civil Code (1962) and series of Nepalese constitutions (2047, 2063), however, strongly denied caste based discriminations; Musahars have been facing intra-caste (among Tarai impure castes or commonly used term Tarai Dalit) and inter-caste segregation. In the name of empowerment, social change and democratic culture formation various efforts have been made by the state and non-state actors to bring about a transformation in the socio-economic conditions of the Musahar community. How were they marginalized from mainstream socialization processes of the state? Observing culture of poverty and social reproduction, Musahars today are like Dalit among the Dalits and marginalized among the marginalized. Being the first agricultural bonded laborer and specialist in cutting soil, the Musahars argued that they made arable land from the dense forest but they failed to register on their name. Now, almost all Musahars are landless. Being landless, they were detached from state institutions, citizenship and excluded from multi spheres of socio-economic life. But, how did the process of landless operate? What were consequences of being landless?

After the political change of 1990, political and non-political organizations, which initiated social movements, have concentrated on marginalized communities in Nepal. Their penetration in marginalized communities has spawned wide range of social networking and activist recruitment (Karki 2006) in the community. In the name of civil society advocacy, specific caste/ ethnic organizations have been formed to mobilize respective communities for 'expansion and contraction of identity boundaries' (Chhetri 2012). Why and how did they resist other culture around their settlement? What are changes seen in the arts of resistance and identity construction among them? The Musahar subject in specific community is historically and culturally constructed. The missing is long historical process of Musahar subject and culture formation with political economic relations among people in particular setting. This article delineates their political economic history of marginalization from tribal stage to free labour in Tarai. This research is based on 'historical dimension to ethnographic work' (Shah 2008a) in which the local historical process that

informed the Musahars response in total socio-political process. It is within this theoretical and anthropological tradition that I analyze the Musahars' marginalization. The detailed fieldwork was carried out from June to November, 2010 and from January to May, 2011 in Lahan- Bastipur area of Siraha district in Nepal.

### **Who are The Musahars?**

Etymological meaning of the word 'Musahar' was derived from their dietary inclination to mouse which is symbolically, as we can see African tribal groups and their dietary practice and cultural characteristics of tribal groups. To begin with, it appears that the community does not have a name of its own. Like many other non-Brahmin castes in South Asia, the name is given on the basis of some reasons. Literally, 'Musahar' means one who eats rats (Jha 1998, Kumar 2006). Mukul Sharma cited Herbert Risley's arguments that Musahar literally meant 'rat-taker' or 'rat-eater' (from 'musa' which means rat and 'hera' means 'seeker') or even 'flesh-seeker' or 'hunter' ('masu' means flesh) (Sharma 1999). Though there have been other opinions about how it originally began and what it actually meant, in the popular world-view "the rat eater" is the notion. Arjun Kumar argued, that is because a good number of Musahars do eat rats, as many other tribal groups do. In the post-harvest season, Musahars seem to compete with rats for the leftover/dropped grains in the field.<sup>2</sup> Having done this for centuries, the community has honed up its skill in catching rats unlike other communities. But eating rats is by no means confined to them. What is important, however, is the dehumanizing stigma attached to the community due to this practice (Kumar 2006).

The Musahars of India belong to the Scheduled castes and populate several districts of north Bihar. As in Nepalese Tarai, they are widely distributed in several districts – Madhubani, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran, Hazaribagh, Santhal Pargana, Bhagalpur, Munger, Purnea, Gaya, Patna etc. Comparatively, more research has been conducted on Musahar of north India which is close to Nepalese boarder. The case of the Musahars of Bihar, a largely landless caste referred to as the Dalits among Dalits, who continue to work as bonded labourers. Nearly 1.1 million population in Bihar, Musahars share their origin with the Kol tribe<sup>3</sup> of Chhota Nagpur (Kumar 2006).

There are various myths and arrival stories among the Musahar communities in Nepal. To trace origin, in 1891, Sir H. Herbert Risley, a colonial official in India stated that 'Musahars are an offshoot of the Bhuiya<sup>4</sup> tribe of Chota Nagpur'. The name Bhuiyan denotes Bhumi (land). Though it shows close link to their occupation but they were landless. Arjun Kumar stated that they began to migrate to the paddy-growing plains of Bihar probably since the 12<sup>th</sup> century and have been the single largest source of agricultural labour in the region ever since (Kumar 2006). Their physical appearance proximity with Bhil and Munda tribes and cultural proximity with Tharu indicate their tribal propinquity. Whether they were Bhuiya tribe or Kol tribe, researchers agreed that they were tribal groups like many indigenous communities of India and Nepal. They were made untouchable before they entered Nepal. But Musahar activists claimed that they were tribal group when they were in dense forest of Tarai before Rana regime. Nepalese Musahars were behaved as untouchable on the basis established relationships between Jamindars and Musahars in Bihar.

Though there is no historical record of their arrival in Nepal, but it is said that large number of Musahars entered Nepal during Rana regime to cut tree for expansion of Indian railway as well as arable land in the Tarai (Jha 1998, NNDSWO 2006). Because of lack of clear demarcation of national territory it was hard to say nationality of settlers and migration in Nepal during Rana period (Regmi 1977). Activist Musahars claimed that they had been living this area before fixed territorial demarcation in Rana regime with India but the plain original settlers of Tarai (Musahars) were treated as Indian at that time (Gaize 1975) and still Musahars are called Indians or new comers. One of the symbol of treating them as Indian is denial of giving citizenship to the Musahars. There are mainly two types of Musahars in Nepal Tarai namely Tirhutiya<sup>5</sup> and Maghadhiya<sup>6</sup> but there is no socio economic and cultural hierarchy among them. They are egalitarian people. They speak Maithali, Vojpuri, Hindi, Nepali and Abadhi languages. Some of them claimed that they had their own language but it vanished when their ancestors came to dominant languages groups. Maithali is their main language in the central east-central Tarai of Nepal.

They have adopted multiple resource-tappings strategies for their survival. Earth work, agricultural labour and digging ponds were considered their traditional livelihood occupations. Fishing, earth work, firewood selling, animal husbandry (cows, goats, ducks), Rikshaw pulling, brick factory labour,

transportation labour, Haruwa-Charuwa, seasonal migration were livelihood strategies among them (NNDSWO 2006). Mukul Sharma (1999) and Suresh Dhakal (2007) analyzed vicious circle of patron-client (Haruwa-Charuwa) ties which were institutionalized as interdependency based on unequal reciprocity among Dalits communities in Bihar and Tarai respectively. The contexts of patron-client weakened their face to face bargaining and resisting capacity.

Haruwa-Charuwa, almost similar to Kamaiya Tharu, is bound not only by debt (because they have not access for institutional loan) but also by moral bondage in that relationship and sometime even by family ties of fictive kinship and loyalty (Gaize 1975). Recently formally bonded labour (Haruwa-Charuwa) is vanishing and brick-laying, Rikshaw pulling and labour migrating are attractive areas of livelihood for them. Due to the use of modern technologies like dozer and tractor in the field, their traditional occupations are almost on the verge of disappearance (Shahi 2009). Despite poor economic positions, both male and female members of the Musahar consume alcoholic beverages regularly. They have their own interpretation and world view of drinking and their activities are apparently irrational. They have fallen into vicious circle of poverty web largely due to multiple dimensions of marginalization, landlessness and low income. Furthermore, social dynamics and unequal power relation have close nexus with the landlessness and marginalization of Musahars.

### **The Musahars as Tarai Dalit**

Mary Cameron (2010), in her ethnographic article titled 'Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a New Nepal', examines the articulation between two kinds of discursive realms (Urban activists' quest for political identity and grass root reality of bearing humiliation in the name of Dalit) involving Dalit identity and caste relations in Nepal. Cameron (2010) analyzes genesis of the term Dalit, etymological meaning and its usage among intellectuals, academia and everyday life world of common people.

The term 'Dalit' was first introduced to Nepal by India's most famous untouchable, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar when he visited Nepal in 1956. It was used in the name of the first organization in Nepal to address untouchable issues, Rastriya Nepal Dalit Jana Vikash Parishad in 1967 (Kisan 2009). The term Dalit is still unfamiliar to people and Dalit themselves in many rural communities in Nepal. The two sets of discourses for and against the continuation of Dalit symbols are

presented throughout her writing. By presenting discussions of the internet community, the author vividly analyzes for the retaining and elimination of the symbol Dalit. Some activists argued that the term is regarded as a symbol of pride and heritage rather than emblem of scorn, and one that presents and unifies different groups of people with similar history of oppression. On the objection of the use of the symbol Dalit, the author quotes many voices. For instance, Prakash Nepal said, "when someone calls Dalit, I feel humiliated no matter how qualified I am ... a doctor, an engineer, a scientist, a teacher, no matter who we are, we are tagged as Dalit ...which will make our generation shameful forever" (Cameron 2010: 22). Similarly, Dr. Ramesh Sunar said, "I do dislike the term Dalit. It comes across like a gaali (insult) to me. No one is born Dalit. We are made to be Dalit...by describing yourself Dalit you are propagating the belief the other side has imposed upon you and accepting your position in the society"(Cameron 2010: 22). This type of dialogue is still undergoing among Dalit intellectuals in Kathmandu.

Tarai Dalit constitutes 4% of total population and 41.44% of total Dalit population of Nepal (CBS2001). According to National livelihood survey 2003/4, poverty rate among the Tarai Dalit is 49.2%, literacy rate ranges 7.3% to 21.1%, and access to higher education is 1%. Among Tarai Dalit, Dhobi has the highest literacy rate i.e 34.6% and the Musahar has the lowest i.e.7.3% (Dahal 2010). The position of the Musahar among Tarai Dalits is the second largest group in terms of population and the lowest in all development indices. Studies showed that 44% of Tarai Dalits are landless and 90 % unable to fulfill food need from their own land (Aahuti 2010) whereas 96.67% Musahars are landless and 100% face food deficit problem. Because of educational, political and economic status, they are unable to enjoy quota opportunities provided in the name of Tarai/Madesi Dalit group.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand political economic dimensions of Hill Dalits<sup>8</sup> is different. 41.9% Hill Dalits are literate and 23% are landless. Tarai Dalits face severe form of caste based discrimination and extra regional and linguistic marginalization in comparison to Hill Dalits. Aahuti focuses on historical political economic relationship as the infrastructure of caste hierarchy and discrimination by imposing fatalistic religious ethos. Higher caste categories tend to legitimize the existing caste system by giving it an aura of divine origin; both genuine personal beliefs and bad faith to perpetuate the status quo act on the creation of this sentiment (Aahuti 2010). Caste based feudal structure was

stronger in Tarai because of large number of high caste landlords and Hindu religious influence of India (Aahuti 2010). Aahuti further explores politico-economic relations of class which is the root of formation of caste system. Hindu feudal caste system applies 'divide and rule' strategy among poor class. The division can be observed as intra discrimination among different groups of Dalits. His argument is class was manipulated by feudalism and manifested caste form because most of the landless people are Dalit both in Hill and Tarai (Aahuti 2010). In conclusion, his argument is political economic relations created by state and non state institutions marginalized Tarai Dalits.

In the same vein, Frederick Gaize analyzed situation of Tarai Dalit in his seminal work "Regionalism and Nationality Unity in Nepal" in 1975. He depicted that in eastern Tarai majority of plain migrants were of poor low caste but were dominated by minority high caste migrants' leadership wherever they settled (Gaize 1975). "As important to the question of hill or plain cultural dominance in the Tarai as the factor of caste ranking is the factor of economic status. The two are related, that is, low caste migrants virtually have low economic status" (Gaize 1975:78). Economic categories like farm laborer, caste –occupation are poor, low caste people, who have little capacity to exert influence in local community affairs. "Such affairs are, as a rule, the domain of the largest of the landowners and occasionally shopkeeper's importance" (Gaize 1975:80). Economic, political and caste status were complementary to each other in Tarai as well as in Nepal. High caste landlords were dominating decision maker who kept Haruwa-Charuwa Musahars labour in their farm of Tarai. It is not always the case because not all high caste people have economically high status and not all Dalits are absolutely poor in other part of Nepal.

Dilli R. Dahal (2010) presents cases of upward social mobility of Dalits by radical improvement of their economic situation. With references to case studies of Teli, Sudi and Kalwar from Tarai; and Kasai from Kathmandu, Dahal claims that economic status supports upward caste mobility. On the basis of Dahal's argument it could be argued that having lower caste status is automatically marginal economic status. In the case of the Musahars, possibility of dramatic economic improvement and social mobility sounds illogical unless they have access to and control over economic resources. Daily wage based livelihood further pushed them into stagnation. The Musahars are interested to get rid of Dalit caste identity prior to economic progress. The Musahars of Central-East



Tarai has organized the first National Conference of Musahars to talk about their issues to be included in the new constitution and largely their identity transformation (from Tarai Dalit caste to indigenous people) agenda at Lahan in March 19-20, 2010 (Giri 2012b). They have been claiming that they were a tribal group before Jamindari- de facto regime in Nepalese Tarai. They have most of the characteristics of an ethnic group which are quite similar to neighboring indigenous people in the Tarai. General food habits, gender roles, rituals practices, occupation and ritual roles in society are corresponding dimensions of their claim to ethnicity. But socially, they are treated as the lowest Dalits in their settlements. Formally they are still Dalit but they have lost credibility of claiming Dalit identity among Dalit groups. They are meshed in multi dimensional intra and inter caste discrimination.

Identity transformation from Caste to Ethnic group and vice versa is not new phenomenon though its intensity has been highly increasing in Nepali society since 1990. Besides Musahar and Kushbadiya (Patharakatta)<sup>9</sup> community of Tarai, Newar Dalits<sup>10</sup> also claimed to be an ethnic group. Government of Nepal has again enlisted the Kushbadiya as one of the indigenous people of Nepal in 2001. Chitra B. Budhathoki (2012) postulated that, most of Pattharakattas in Kapilbastu claimed themselves as Dalit. Now they are making their identity as indigenous people. The government of Nepal categorized Pattharakatta as Dalit on one hand but categorized as Kuchbandiya as indigenous people on the other hand (Budhathoki 2012).

Recently, the World Bank studies enlisted 42 most marginalized caste ethnic groups of Nepal and out of them 15 are from Dalits and 10 are from Tarai Dalits.<sup>11</sup> Based on critiques of economic and socio-cultural aspects of Dalits' marginalization, Musahars have been facing multiple levels of marginalization. The dynamic of politico-economic relations and dynamics of agency produce diverse social and economic status, and quality of human being. The community and people who have been not given opportunity to play significant roles in the social dynamics throughout history ultimately result multiple capability failure.

### **Concept of Politico Economic Marginalization and Resistance**

Local political economic conditions are byproducts of existing social order and authority. The constitution of political economy, according to Michel Foucault (1991), depends upon the emergence from among all the various elements of

wealth of population. "The new science called political economy arises out of the perception of new networks of continuous and multiple relations between population, territory and wealth; and this is accompanied by the formation of a type of intervention characteristic of government, named intervention in the field of economy and population" (Foucault 1991:100). He means that political economy implies that the management of population not only concerns the collective mass, the level of its aggregate effects, but also its depths and its details government.

Similarly D.Saddon, P.Blaikie and J.Cameron (2002) analyze politico-economic dimension of pauperization of landless peasants and workers in Nepal. For them access position of the household is determined by peasants and workers choices, responses and combination of various aspects. "The access position of the household is derived from a) control over the sum of various physical assets, both private (land, labour, livestock) and public; and b) from the sum of social assets" (Saddon et al. 2002:71). The definition and nature of an asset is determined by the politico-economic dimension and development within it will alter the importance of each asset. On the basis of conceptual and empirical definitions, poverty is progressively created through series of exclusionary activities in the society. Political and economic aspects of exclusionary social relations largely dominate other aspects of social activities. Focusing economic dimensions, Amartya Sen analyzes multidimensional effect of marginalization (Sen 2000). Marginalization is a dynamic process of progressive 'rupturing of social bond' at the individual and collective levels, and the causal relations among dimensions of disadvantage may run in many directions, and reinforce or cushioning the impact of one another ( Sen 2000, Silver 2007). It is a structural process of social isolation of stripping away multiple dimensions of social involvement. According to Amartya Sen's capability perspective, marginalization can be constitutively a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures (Sen 2000:5).

In the response to marginalization, resistance is deployed variously as, for example, "acting autonomously, in one's own interests" (Gregg 1993:172); "active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to... abusive behaviour and...control" (Profitt 1996:25); "engaging in behaviors despite opposition" (Carr 1998:543); cultural reaction (Shah 2008a) . Resistance is most readily thought to refer to social movements and contentious politics

(McAdam et.al.2001). The act of resistance includes behaviours as dramatic as violence or as subtle as working slowly, feigning sickness, wearing particular types of clothes, making laughter, drinking alcohol, mocking, or stealing from one's employer (Scott 1985, 1990). He explains: "Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth" (Scott 1985:29). Scott argues that peasants often take part in small acts of unorganized, off stage performance or hidden transcripts, and claimed that organized, overt resistance, on stage performance or public transcripts is usually restricted to poor classes (Scott 1990). He adds that resistance of the weak is frequently well hidden from the powerful, taking the form of small but meaningful acts of resistance that are not readily visible to the casual observer.

My argument is that the Musahars, being weak people and unlike Scott's (1990) argument of powerless group mostly employed in off stage resistance and hidden transcripts, largely applied in on stage resistance after political change of post 1990. Contrary to Scott's view, 'on stage performances' were predominantly employed by the Musahars which I observed as primary methods of resistance. Therefore, political economic changes make difference to the strategies of resistance among the weakest group in the society.

### **Social Composition**

Both on and off road, urban and village settlements of Lahan Municipality and Bastipur VDC respectively, are heterogeneous in terms of caste/ethnic composition in Siraha district. Lahan is the center for recent movement from where Madesh movement sprang after the killing of Ramesh Mahato in 2007. It was also center during Jamindari system because Tharu Jamindars controlled land around Lahan and they initiated settlement of other groups. Bastipur village was renowned for traditional system of Jamindari system predominated by hill origin people. Giri Jamindars controlled land and settlement in the village for a long time. In the aftermath of Madesh movement, most of the hill origin households were migrated elsewhere and those who were living there were felt suffocation. Yadav, Koiri, and Tarai Brahmin are socio economically and politically predominant castes groups in both areas whereas Dom, Khatwe, Musahar, Dusadha and Chamar are marginalized Dalit caste groups. Tharu and Teli-Sudi have middle socio-political status and are economically well-off. A series of

movements after 2006 do not bring significant change among the Dalit caste groups. Neither had they got sense of ownership of movement nor benefit because the movements did not put forward issues of Dalits in Tarai. Middle caste groups became politically and economically powerful in both areas of study. Dalits are still segregated in public social fabric.

The Musahars were settled not only for agricultural labour of Jamindars but also security of *Kamats*<sup>12</sup> managed by functionaries of Jamindars. Each Musahari (Homogenous Musahar settlement locally called Musahari) in Bastipur and Lahan represents single Kamat during Jamindari system. But, some traditional settlements were evicted in the name of resettlement and privatization of public land by power elites. After elimination of Jamindari, Musahar settlements were left to the settlers by Jamindars without transforming ownership. Land registration system denied them ownership and declared their settlements village Block i.e. public land with settlement controlled by village. Most of Musaharis in Lahan and Bastipur are in village block. Long bamboo erected in the settlement, the symbol of Dina Bhadri, is easy identification of Musahari. It is commonly said that Jamindars had brought few Musahars from the southern part of the country by luring their food and livelihood security. Other Musahars were either brought by the relatives of earlier settler or migrated in search of work from southern part of the country. By observing Bastipur and Lahan Musaharies, it can be said that their geographical and social spaces are isolated from rest of the people. According to Ramnarayan the reasons for the isolation of social and spatial locations are: firstly, the Musahars want to stay far from other people because they want to live free from direct observation of powerful dominant group, their humiliation and coercive caste regulations; and secondly, other people do not allow them to live near their settlement. Other possible rationale would be that public land is out of established settlement area. Traditional settlements were already isolated and new settlements of Musahars are built at marginal public places. Fertile and strategic public places were either registered by local elites through corruption channel or by socially cunning landless groups occupied. Leftover or neglected locations were for Musahars. The Musahars politico economic marginalization could be studied in three specific stages and processes of historical transformation of their livelihood. They are: a) their livelihood and cultural traits before they became subject of Jamindari system; b) their cultural and social boundary and socio-economic relations with Jamindars

and public; c) their cultural and social relationships, resistance, public and hidden transcripts after they became free subject of liberal market economy.

### **Musahars as Tribal group**

The Musahars claimed that they were tribal group like Bhil and Munda until recent past. Arun Kumar (2006) argues that Musahars share their origin with the Kol tribe of Chhota Nagpur. Dr. Mahadev Shah, the Principle of Softech College at Lahan agreed with their claim to tribal identity and physical proximity with the Jhangad and Munda of Tarai and cultural proximity with the Tharu ethnic group of the region. He said, "The Musahars are pretty similar to Bhil and Munda tribal groups. I have grown up with them and observed tribal characteristics and cultural practices." He added that "Etymological meaning of the word 'Musahar' was derived from their dietary inclination to mouse which is symbolically, as you can see African tribal groups and their dietary practice, cultural characteristics of tribal groups. They were Hinduized and made untouchable when they came as labour force of Jamindari system in India".

According to Ramnarayan Saday, ex-chairman of Risikul Saday Welfare Society, Musahars were tribal group before Rana regime and Jamindari system in Nepal Tarai. Even now, they prefer hunting, gathering, fishing and semi nomadic life. There is still famous statement among the Musahars "*jungle hete to maus, sag naihete?*" (If there is jungle how could you say there will be no meat and vegetables?). Other ethnic characteristics are: they do not have the concept of purity and pollution during menstruation and pure and impure food category, collection of *Ghugi*<sup>13</sup> and wild yams, women command dominant position as in among the Tharus and they have decisive role in the family. They have distinct identical settlement pattern and food habits.

Nepalese Musahars were treated and categorized as Tarai Dalits on the basis of relationships between Jamindars and Musahars in Uttar Pradesh. Ramsafal Saday, the only lecturer and degree holder from Musahar community in Nepal<sup>14</sup>, argues that without detailed study of the Musahars' cultural traits which are completely different from caste system, they were put under Dalit. He adds, "captured people were transformed into slave in different process. Hierarchies were created to legitimize exploitation of slaves. It is not surprising that the Musahars were controlled by Hindu caste Jamindars and dehumanized as much as they could to exploit their physical labour. It is not only the case of the

Musahars, but African American and African tribes also have similar history.” He expressed aspiration of equality by stating Martin Luther would come to Musahari soon. The Musahar activists also not only resist upon imposed Musahar Dalit identity but also started identity transformation campaign from Tarai Dalit to Indigenous people. Their main argument is that they are an indigenous group with distinct physical and cultural practices out of caste system. He restated that Musahars assumed they were human but completely different from rest of other communities in the society. They did not compare themselves with any other communities because they thought they were not comparable category with other. The Musahars did not have any dream or future planning because their mind did not go that far or they were busy thinking about present problems.

To go through caste cultural and ritual occupation of the Musahars, the system did not allocate any specific ritual roles for the Musahars as other (Dalit) castes have been practicing in the Tarai since time immemorable. Their claim is that physical (wage) labour was/is not ritual occupation of any specific caste. The caste system did not ritually restrict physical labour to Brahmins and Chhetris too. So, physical labour could not be ritual occupation of the Musahars. According to Chauthi Saday, an old man, the Musahars were tribal group before Jamindari system was there in Nepalese Tarai. As they were told by former generation old men, they did not know anything about agriculture and animal husbandry. They were pagan. They used to eat fruits and vegetable whatever found in the jungle.

#### **Musahars as Unfree Labour<sup>15</sup>**

There was long history of Jamindari system. To trace the history of Jamindari system in Tarai, its roots went to India especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Nepalese Jamindari system was a kind of Indian extension. There were Jamindars in the Tarai region of Nepal even before the installation of the Rana regime, but the term appears to have applied to large nonworking landlords. In 1861, comprehensive regulations were promulgated outlining the basic framework of the Jamindari system, within which entrepreneurial ability and initiative could be utilized for the extension of the cultivated area in the eastern Tarai districts (Regmi 1977). These regulations provided that any individual could offer to reclaim virgin waste or forest lands which were situated at a distance of a day's walk from existing settlements and which peasants were unable to reclaim

through their own labor and resource. If anyone's offer was accepted, he was permitted to procure settlers from India, or else divert cultivators from the Birta lands (Regmi 1977). Any Indian who moved into Nepali territory along with his family was given a free allotment of agricultural land in addition to a home site and free supplies of building material for constructing a hut. Most of the Musahars' families were entered into Nepal because of encouragement of Jamindars of the Tarai. Prior (Musahars) settlers were lured by the Jamindars and made the bonded labor in to their territory. They were given minimum facility within allocated settlement. Jamindars used the Musahars as agricultural labor force and security guard of the property and family of the Jamindar. During autocratic regime of Jamindars, the Musahars were become Haruwa - Charuwa like Kamaiya (bonded labor) in the western Nepal. Musahars were used out door and labor intensive works. Bonded Musahars were completely dependent on the landlord for their livelihood. They were not allowed to make any decisions but compelled to work on manager's decisions. They used to get limited food for few days from their landlords. It was long period of time in which they developed dependency culture on extreme form. Later on they were dependent on per day food with Jamindars which is resonant behaviors of the Musahars at present.

Were the Musahars made bonded labourers first and then included into the caste fold as untouchable or the other way round? The historical enquiries, including Ranjit Guha's subaltern studies (1988) and Gyan Prakash's (1990), are not very clear on this point in India too. It seems more logical on the basis of historians that they were brought into the caste order as untouchables first and made bonded labourer later, as in this way the system of domination got doubly secured. The cultural-religious super ordination legitimates and solidifies the system of bonded labour with minimum resistance. At first glance the point may appear unnecessarily laboured, but it begins to unravel its significance as we delve deeper in reasons for the tenacity of the unfree labour system. Without pondering over this issue, the processes of domination becoming cultural common sense cannot be grasped.

In Jamindari system, being bonded labourers; Musahars were like animal power or machine. All the responsibilities were taken by Malik (Jamindar). Neither had they owned land nor did they have any work with local and national government institutions. They never got opportunities to participate public meeting except as witnesses and for clarification. They did not have any words to

speak with state authorities. Communication between authority and subject were connected through land in Jamindari system. Landholding size was one of the main sources of power until recently (Regmi 1977). Caste based ritual occupation was another means of state socialization. Being landless and ritually roleless, they were excluded from the state orientation, state-individual processes of socialization (Sharma 2004) and top down imposition of duties of the subject that was process of subject formation. Therefore, there was a main gap among the Musahar subject formation. Musahars were out from caste cultural practices because their occupation was not tightly attached ritual processes of caste. Kasindra Yadav, social science researcher gave examples of caste occupation's attachment with ritual processes of people. For instance, Khatwe were called to carry *Doli*<sup>16</sup> during marriage ceremony. Chamars were Musicians and they made musical instruments. During marriage, Dipawali, Holi, etc, Chamars were busy to make Dholak (musical instrument) and other instruments. They were essential for celebration of festivals. Doms were called on Death rituals. But Musahars were deprived of Hindu caste ritual roles that meant they were not counted as an essential part of the society. Because of the exclusion of the public gathering, their sphere was limited only within the particular Jamindar and among themselves. Ramnarayan Saday argued that for them, the Jamindar was everything: police, administration, law, order, court, state etc. Mostly, they did not have voices, even if they had; those voices were limited to Jamindar.

State legalized Jamindari system which has created multidimensional exclusionary contexts among Musahars. Neither they got opportunity to be ruled from the state nor did they learn how to rule other including family and society. Michel Foucault's (1991) terms, Musahars were excluded from art of governmentality. In Foucauldian concept, Musahars were deprived from the art of self government to the art of properly governing a family. The first one concerned politics whereas the second one was related to economy. The problem faced by Musahars during Jamindari system was lack of upwards continuity socialization of subject with the state.

Today's Musahars' personalities were constructed in Jamindari system. Their specialized labour work was soil cutting to make land plain. It is believed that they came into Nepal by bringing spade and Talo.<sup>17</sup> They have tentative ideas to make land plain. They believed that their own bodies were resources since they were landless and deprived from the access to production resources. They blessed



their offspring and children by saying "*Bhagwan jindagi ra jyan dete to Mait katoke khebe*" (when god gives life and body, one can eat by cutting soil). Being strong and healthy is great asset in the Musahar community. Body is their resource because their livelihood is completely depends on physical la

### **Musahar as Free Labour<sup>18</sup>**

After the abolition of Jamindari landownership, feudalistic forms of bonded labor system existed for a long time. After the Jamindari abolition of the early 1960s, the picture became a bit more blurred, as a large number of Jamindars resume cultivation of their lands, but the basic essence and division remained. They became the larger cultivators, often with holdings greatly in excess of the land ceilings imposed by the government, holdings which they were able to retain through a combination of relatives and unidentified transfers, badly maintained land records and corruption. The Musahars stayed where they were as landless labourers. They were practically Haruwa and Charuwa until 1990. There was slow movement of freedom consciousness among them. The freedom process became intensive during insurgency, People's Movement II and Madhes Movement.

The Haruwa-Charuwa and Kamaiya, poor and landless people were compelled to work in landlord's farm till abolition of Kamaiya or bonded labor Act 2001. Though it was abolished, practices are still found in the communities. The Musahars began to come out of the bonded labor system after revival of democracy in 1990 and aftermath. They started to move to government offices and other people. Maulai Saday, 46 year inhabitant of Lahan narrates his life experiences this way:

When I was around 10 years old, I was almost mature Charuwa in Satya Naran Chaudhari (pseudo name) a Tharu Family in Lahan. Later, I became Haruwa for a long time in his family. I had neither land ownership nor citizenship. I am not sure how many years I passed in the Tharu family because you know Musahars do not remember a date. When the family sold the land, there was no work for me. Then I came out means I started wage labourer at different places. It was almost 15 to 20 years ago. I was free to choose whatever work I liked. I have tested Riksa pulling, brick kilns, seasonal migration in Punjab and other. Then I learned carpentry with other caste fellow workers in the jungle. Then I got good wage during building construction in Lahan. I have saved some money too. The problem was security of the money. You know, Musahari is not only place of starvation but

also there are open door one storey huts. If all family members would be out anyone can enter in it. My friend suggested me to deposit money in the bank. I went to bank accordingly. The bank asked me citizenship. I did not have it. Then I spent some amount of that money to make citizenship. District administration office demanded land certificate. I did not have land. I realized that being landless was not only limited to food deprivation but also deprivation of legal socialization of state. I requested my previous Malik the Tharu family to help. They supported me and I got citizenship. Then I have saved money and bought small piece of land to build house. Now, I have my own house. My son is in Punjab. I am thinking of sending him to Qatar or Malasiya when he will return. I have interactions with politicians, fellow workers and other people at the market. I came under open sky to make decision about my family. I would be still Haruwa if the family has not sold land.

The main point of the case of Maulai is public interaction and public socialization through market economy. When they came to public interaction then they needed citizenship certificate in election process, school, forest, bank, name registration in VDC office and everywhere with state relationship. Another important point of the case is that the relationships between access to land resource and multiple capability failure of the Musahars. The linkages of excluding from being land owner have multidimensional among the Musahars of Lahan-Bastipur. The impacts of deprivation in social space, educational spheres, political spaces and economic behaviours are few observable facts. There are other invisible impacts of the deprivation on their personal and collective level too.

For the case of citizenship, they started to speak with the state because it was concerned with central decision of state. For example, to process for foreign labour migration, it was basic requirement. By this way, they learned how to bargaining with the state for other issues. They slowly got familiarized with market economy. When they came into market as free laborer, they slowly entered into social, economic and political spheres of the society. Sotilal Saday, former Haruwa from Bastipur said, "When I was haruwa, my Malik gave grains in the time of crisis. It was Malik responsibility too because I worked for him whole year. Now, if I have to feed my family when I have no money, my whole family would be hungry. You know, nobody gives cash credit or food to Musahars. I have to buy everything because I don't have land. I have to go wage labour everyday."

As a free laborer, few Musahar youth started migration for foreign labor (out of India). Some of them saved money and educated their children. Very few Musahars have passed school level education and been involved teaching and other private job. Open market economy widened livelihood opportunities. This weakened traditional caste based patron client relationships and rigid cultural constraints of the Musahars. In post 1990, dynamic of socio political changes in Nepal changed traditionally established sources and location of power. The traditional sources of political power were: caste, land, and education. Series of movements replaced location of power from caste and land into political party and civil society (Hachhethu 2006). On one hand, political parties have penetrated grass root by forming political structure and involving people in a number of political gatherings. On the other, in the context of Nepal, from 1990 to 2006, the number of NGOs, most of them funded by bilateral or multilateral sources, had increased from 193 to over 33000 (Shah 2008b). The expansion consequences of political parties and civil society organizations clearly manifested on implementation of international human rights instruments and caste ethnic identity politics. The Civil society engagements support not only political empowerment of marginalized people but also ensure participation through policy process of the expansion of social equality, liberty and democratization of state institutions. The Musahars argued that the structures were changed but the characters were same in disguised form new location. Ramnarayan Saday frequently questioned that same landlords or newly established landlords are main decision maker as a member of political parties in local level. Same faces of landlords blanketed in market, media, and civil society. But situation of market was not as pessimistic as presented by Ramnarayan. The Musahars including other caste labourer campaigned to hike wage rate in 1998 and it was successful campaign to increase wage rate, and food quality. None of the Musahars were in central level position in any well known political parties so far. They were rarely nominated in powerless positions at local level and their participation sound token for inclusive party.

### **Changes on Identity and Resistance**

It is said that Musahars are idiosyncratic people. They were still idiosyncratic in terms of freedom of choice and resistance of work. They did not want to bind themselves within any strict coercive rules. They prefer group work out of direct

dictation and observation by employers. Therefore, most of them go to brick factories rather than to landlords' fields. They make fun by imitating most cruel landlord and master in the community. The pretender imitates whatever activities he has seen regarding the landlord. One by one they pretend style of speaking gesture, walking and advising others. This kinds of off stage performance or hidden transcripts in Scott's term were predominant style of resistance before 2000. They were depicted as renowned cheaters and drunkards but theoretically cheating and alcohol drinking were arts of resistance. There was strong mistrust of other people upon Musahars. Chandreswore Yadhav from Bastipur said, "We could not believe upon Musahars because they are not honest on work. If I pay a day wage earlier to ensure work, he/she will not come on work rather they go to market". There is dictum among Tarai non Musahars ' *parewako dhan ra Musahar ko jan ko kunai Biswas hudaina* ' (both Musahar as labour and pigeons as property are not to be trusted). Both of them can take a flight anytime. Counting pigeons' wealth is as foolish task as to believe upon the Musahar worker. Similarly, Musahars resist other caste people simply for not caring about their need, opposing to work in their farm and expression of anger when other caste people come into Musahars' settlement. They do not want to be friendly and cooperative with planning of other people.

Their art of resistance has been changing from 'Hidden' to 'Public' or off stage to on stage performance since 2000. Their socio economic and political status has not been changed for a long time but on stage performance has been predominant tool of resistance against domination these days. Identity campaign, educational campaign, public meeting and attitude and behavioural change campaign are a few examples of public performance of the Musahars. On the contrary to Scott (1985), weak people predominantly applied on stage resistance against domination in the context of Musahars in Tarai. For instance, their identity campaign is best example of change on the strategy of resistance among the Musahars.

The Musahars have been campaigning for new social and cultural identification since 2000s. The idea of one Musahar ethnic identity was cultivated with the formation of Nepal Risikul Saday Welfare Society, a Musahar Jati organisation and efforts of its founder activists. In the beginning it fought against forced eviction of Musahar settlements in the name of resettlement and protection of public places. By conducting educational

campaign and advocacy for the rights of the Musahars, the organisation succeeded to win the trust of common Musahars. Before the formation of the organisation, the activists raised ethnic identity issues among themselves and with others at local and district levels. When they started awareness, educational, behavioural change and right based advocacy among the Musahars of Siraha and neighbouring districts, the idea of ethnic identity mushroomed among the Musahars. They circulated the idea of formation of Musahar organisation in all districts of East-Central Tarai. Musahars from other neighbouring districts also formed their own Jati organisations and practised the direction/circulations of Risikul Saday Welfare Society accordingly. Every district activists held district level discussions in the name of identity and Musahars' welfare in the changing context. In many districts, there was no unanimity among the Musahars regarding identity transformation from Dalit to ethnic group. With coordination of all neighbouring districts, Musahars of Siraha organised national assembly to talk about identity transformation and dissemination of the debate all over the country at Lahan in 2010.

There was unanimity of their tribal history and ethnic symptoms available in their cultural traits. They calculated economic, social and cultural advantages of being ethnic group. Ramkrishna Saday, a Musahar activist of Udayapur argued that Dalit was an appropriate identity for them because they were suppressed, discriminated and excluded in socio-economic spaces of the society. He stressed that the state has to compensate for the loss and pain of discrimination and opined that for the collective bargaining with state, the Musahars had to strengthen the established Dalit identity further. He emphasised that the Musahars needed to be empowered to access the state provided reservation seats and educational scholarships for Dalits. On the contrary, Ramnarayan Saday argued that they should not keep on with Dalit identity because the word itself brought sense of humiliation and discrimination and the future generation would have to be shameful forever. He claimed that to escape from caste discrimination and untouchability, it was better to assert an ethnic identity. Some Musahars argued that if they were registered as an indigenous community, their current ongoing supports for education and opportunity from National Dalit Commission and other Dalit organisations would cease to exist. Others said that socio-economically having an ethnic identity would be more beneficial and culturally they would be out of burden of untouchability. After two days' serious

discussions on the identity transformation issue among the Musahars, the conference decided to award the responsibility of taking the issue forward to the newly formed national committee of Musahar. They concluded that being an indigenous group was far better than being Musahar Dalit. They agreed that at least the Tarai indigenous communities would not treat them as untouchable which will be a good start for the elimination of caste based discrimination in their residence areas. In the mean time, as the deadline of registering of new ethnic group had passed, the committee is planning to apply for the new identity next time.

### **Conclusion**

Political economic characteristics of the state throughout history transformed the Musahars from tribal group to bonded labour and later free labour. Land tenure system and caste system had pushed them landless and powerless socio economic status which has been reproducing till now. Land is multidimensional symbolic power in this society because it gives opportunity to deal with public as well as self psychological formation of subjection. Politico economic history of Nepal communicates unequal distribution of land and primarily in the case of so called lower castes. In this sense, caste is not only socio cultural phenomena but also economic category.

Their socio economic status changes coincided with caste ethnic identity from caste to ethnic identity politics. Being landless Haruwa-Charuwa, wage labour and out of ritual roles of caste system, they were deprived from both mainstream socialization process of state through interaction with local government institutions and socialization through integrated caste system. The caste system does not bind them as an essential entity by providing specific ritual division of labour within the society. Other castes have their own specific ritual occupations and roles in villages. However, the Musahars do not have any ritual occupation. Soil cutting is not ritual occupation, rather it is just labour and people of other castes do practice the same. Their cultural tenets including gender roles are quite similar to Tharu community of the Central-East Tarai and physical appearance is similar to Jhangad and Munda.

To sum up, after political change of 1990 and 2006, political parties and civil society have become key players of the socio economic and political affairs from the local to national level. Traditional location and sources of power have been

changed from land and caste to political parties and civil society. The effect of the change can be observed on change of resistance strategy of the Musahars from hidden to public performance. The recent changes observed nationwide in identity polity have hit the Musahars hard. The new social identity activism of the Musahars is a process of rewriting history on the basis of some observed historical facts, some oral history and experiences. As other groups applied new identification as a method for politico economic opportunity in the society, the Musahars, being highly marginalised in all arenas, started new social identity activism to overcome deeply rooted social exclusion. The main function of such collective engagement of identity transformation processes by organising conferences seems to be maintaining the jati unity, integrity, solidarity, collective bargaining with the state and society on the one hand and to be free from the burden of caste discrimination, purity and pollution practices of society on the other.

#### Notes

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2. Symbolic indication of level of poverty among the community.
3. Scheduled tribe of India
4. Scheduled tribe of India
5. Tirhutiya Musahars believed that their ancestors were from ancient Tirhut state.
6. Maghadhiya Musahars believed that their ancestors belonged to Magadha or Madhyadesa state.
7. Dom, Chamar, Bantar, Chidimar, Dhobi, Dusadh, Halkhor, Khatwe, Musahar, Patharkatta and Tatma are enlisted Tarai Dalit Group.
8. Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, Badi belong to hill Dalits
9. Pattharkattas or Kushbadiya were enlisted as Tarai Dalit before 2001 in Nepal. Government of Nepal has again enlisted the Kushbadiya as one of the indigenous people of Nepal in 2001.

10. Kapali, Kasai, Pode, and Halahulu, kusule were listed under Newar Dalit but now Kapali and kasai are registered themselves as ethnic group.
11. Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, Badi from hill and Dom, Chamar, Bantar, Chidimar, Dhobi, Dusadh, Halkhor, Khatwe, Musahar and Tatma from Tarai are most marginalized Dalits (Bennett and parajuli 2010)
12. The word Kamat was used to denote husked rice collection house surrounded by the settlements of labourers, managers and other functionaries of Jamindari System.
13. Ghugi is a kind of snail found in water pond and shallow water places. It has a hard spiral shell . It is boiled and outer shell is thrown. Some people make small hole on the shell and sucked meat. Some people take out meat and fried it.
14. He has been teaching in Murarca Campus in lahan since 2010.
15. An unfree, or bond(ed) labour, by contrast, is one whose bargaining power is virtually non- existent, or has been surrendered. Such a labourer does not possess the right or has yielded the right to refuse to work under the terms set by his master. Through customs, compulsions, or specific obligation, the bond(ed) labourer is tied to his master's needs. He can neither quit not take up work for another master without first receiving permission
16. Carrere of bride and bridegroom
17. Talo is a homemade tool used to carry soil from one place to another place. It is carried on the shoulder balancing front and back.
18. A free labour is one who is able to accept or reject the conditions and wages offered by the employer. If he wishes, he may refrain altogether from working. Once having taken the job, he can decide to give notice and quit. Economic stringency may indeed compel a free labour to agree temporarily to terms he does not consider favourable. But his basic right to refuse work or to seek alternative employment remains uncompromised.

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## LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, INTERSEX AND THEIR LIFE CHANCES IN NEPAL<sup>1</sup>

Sadixya Bista

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to comprehend the experiences and life opportunities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) persons in Nepal. Relying on Arjan De Haan's concept of multi-dimensionality of deprivation and the relations and processes that cause deprivation, it analyzes the social relationship and the existing educational and employment condition of LGBTI persons in Nepal. Based on an in-depth interview, direct observation, case study and documentary evidence, paper explores LGBTI persons experience such as- rift from the family set-up and the sense of loneliness and imperceptibility they experience at school/college and workplace.*

### **Background**

Heterosexuality is a conventional standard, which is thought to be normal and ordinary phenomenon. Often we suppose that heterosexuality is unchanging, universal, essential and a historical (Katz 1990:150). The affirmation of heterosexuality as a social norm underestimates the diverse sexuality. Consequently, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) persons, who fail to conform socially, constructed gender expectations are disproportionately subjected to discrimination and exclusion.

LGBTI persons around the world are amongst those most vulnerable to violence and killings. Many have committed suicide and others were murdered, physically assaulted and ostracized from house for being different<sup>2</sup>. Such discrimination, lack of social support, limited social relation and care have exacerbated their condition.

Worldwide, LGBTI persons are subjected to persistent human rights violations because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. These human rights violations take many forms, from denials of the rights to life, freedom from torture, and security of the person, to discrimination in accessing economic, social and cultural rights such as health, housing, education and the right to work, from non-recognition of personal and family relationships to pervasive interferences with personal dignity, suppression of diverse sexual identities, attempts to impose heterosexual norms, and pressure to remain silent and invisible (Flaherty and Fisher 2008: 208).

In Nepal, with the new democratic polity and pluralistic pretensions, the claim of LGBTI has emerged as an expression of what was dormant in the earlier ruling. This has to do largely with changes in socio-political environment of the country of late. The Supreme Court<sup>3</sup> of Nepal on December 21, 2007 declared that all discriminatory laws against LGBTI persons must be repealed by the government and provision be made by the concerned authority for recognition of the human person as not only male or female but also as third gender<sup>4</sup> in terms of citizenship rights based on government documents.

Although there is a legal provision to protect rights of LGBTI persons, there remains sufficient room for improvement in their lives. There is in fact, much textual evidence that LGBTI persons have been discriminated in the socio-legal sphere even after the historic decision of the court. For instance, LGBTI persons are still denied to usual socio-cultural affairs, daily ritualistic activities and public services. Hence, LGBTI persons, who are “out of the closet”<sup>5</sup>, have limited social relation and limited life chances<sup>6</sup> to enhance their status. Thus, this paper has made an effort to explore a) their social relationship (individual and institutional level) b) their access over formal education and employment

### **General Literature**

*Dimension of Social Exclusion:* The notion of social exclusion is a way of conceptualizing society, including the processes of deprivation that are an essential part of that society. It helps in identifying the processes that lead to and cause deprivation (De Haan1999: 26). The concept further provides context-specific framework for analysis on who is being excluded, who excludes and why excludes.

Arjan De Haan in his article- Social Exclusion: Enriching the Understanding of Deprivation, suggests that the concept has two main defined characteristics. Primarily, the concept focuses on the multidimensionality of deprivation, on the fact that people are often deprived of different things at the same time. It refers to exclusion (deprivation) in the economic, social, political and other relevant sphere simultaneously. Secondly, social exclusion explicitly focuses on the relations and processes that cause deprivation. Hence, the concept goes beyond mere descriptions of deprivation, and focuses attention on social relations, the processes and institutions that underlie and are part and parcel of deprivation (De Haan 1999:26).

Correspondingly, Adam Smith too was much concerned with relational deprivations that would impoverish human lives in an absolute way. For him “not being able to appear in public without shame” is a good example of a deprivation that takes the form of social exclusion. This relates to the importance of taking part in the community life. Smith’s general point that an

inability to interact freely with others is an important deprivation in itself. Therefore, not being able to interact with others may directly impoverish a person's life and additionally reduces economic and other relevant opportunity that comes from the social contact (Sen2000:4).

The disadvantages faced by the excluded may be, and often are, interrelated. For example, people belonging to minorities have higher school drop-out rates, also may have a greater risk of being unemployed or employed in precarious jobs and hence be low paid, less educated, and have little political or citizenry right, and fewer social contacts (De Haan1999: 27). Therefore, social exclusion does not limit itself to discrimination of certain form but discrimination and denial of access of opportunities in all spheres of life.

### **Social Exclusion and LGBTI persons in Nepal**

LGBTI persons as a minority group are bound to suffer various manifestations of social exclusion in both individual and institutional level (Takács, et al.2008:11). They often become victims of multidimensional mechanisms of social exclusion and multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. In contrast to other minorities, LGBTI persons claim more for social recognition than for redistribution of resources (Takács, et al.2008: 6). Lack of social and legal recognition often leads to the ambiguous citizen status and further exacerbates the condition of LGBTI persons.

In Nepal there have been some visible changes in legal and social sphere for LGBTIs of late. In December 2007 the Supreme Court of Nepal issued a landmark decision, which reinforced fundamental rights of LGBTI persons. Accordingly, it was directed by the court to repeal all discriminatory laws against LGBTI persons and make provision for recognition of the 'third gender' in government documents (Decision of the Supreme Court on the LGBTI people, 2008:285). Consequently, many people with such propensity have started to "come out" of the closet and few have even managed to get respectful position in the society.

Nepal government, in particular, has made remarkable step towards ensuring equality for LGBTI persons in recent years. After the court's decision, the third gender began to appear in various administrative nodes of the government. The Ministry of Youth and Sports added third-gender to its National Youth Policy in 2010. Further, the new three-year National Human Rights Work plan 2011-2014 included sexual and gender minorities rights program endorsed and published by prime minister's office and ministerial council of Nepal government's.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, things have changed after the historic ruling; people and concerned authority have become more receptive.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite all the achievements, LGBTI persons are compelled to face marginalization and discrimination. For instance, in the 2011 census an

official count of the number of people in the country who identify as third-gender was expected. But the enumeration was proved problematic and the preliminary data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics revealed a zero count for third gender citizens. Many third-gender citizens had to fight to be recorded properly. Reports of discrimination and fraud surfaced, accusing enumerators of using pencils to record gender instead of the CBS-mandated blue ink.<sup>9</sup> In September 2010 sexual minorities alleged that the then Home Minister refused<sup>10</sup> to issue citizenship cards to transgender persons, contravening a Supreme Court directive and in response, when dozens of LGBT individuals staged protests in the capital then police detained some protesters without charge for several hours (Sify News, Sep 14, 2010).<sup>11</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

This paper is based on the findings of the fieldwork that researcher<sup>12</sup> had conducted in Kathmandu during October 2010- January 2011. The researcher has relied on different qualitative data collection technique i.e.in-depth interviews, direct observation, case study and documentary evidence. These different data collection techniques helped deal with limitations of each technique. LGBTI persons affiliated to Blue Diamond Society (BDS), an organisation working for sexual and gender minorities on social justice, human rights, sexual health and HIV/AIDS and Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities, Nepal (FSGMN), are taken as a unit of analysis. . As to reflect the active stance, the word “participant” has been used throughout this paper referring to LGBTI persons that researcher had interviewed. The word seems to capture both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that researcher try to build in the interviewing relationships (Seidman 2006:14)

Major participants were those LGBTI persons who have revealed identity either in the media or amongst their colleagues at the BDS. However, emphasis was laid on avoiding any organizational involvement and biasness on participant’s response. Participants were treated more as individuals rather than employees/ associates of BDS.18 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals, who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. As the LGBTI population may apply different identity labels or no identity labels, it was difficult to get hold of people belonging to a single category. Therefore, this paper addresses issues associated to LGBTI persons, although in part cites evidence that exclusively focuses on gays, lesbians and transgender population. The word seems to capture both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that researcher try to build in the interviewing relationships. Their experiences and the life stories formed the basis of analysis (Kumashiro 1999:492). The Snowball approach was employed to select participants.<sup>13</sup> After every formal

in-depth interview, participants were asked if they could introduce someone else in their network, who might be interested in sharing life experiences.

Most of the participants helped the researcher by referring friends or colleagues. When a researcher employs non-probability sampling technique like snowball,<sup>14</sup> it would be a problem to decide the sample size that ensures trustworthiness of revealed data. The major criterion to decide trustworthiness of data is the saturation of information (Seidman2006: 48). As an interviewer, when the researcher started to hear same thing over the period of time then sample size was decided.<sup>15</sup>

### **Discussion and analysis**

*Understanding of “self” and the “society”:* For LGBTI persons, "coming out" is always a daunting process as they position themselves in line with common perception of heterosexuality held by the society. Initially for most of the participants, 'self' was reflective of the society but eventually when they started feeling different than heterosexuals it was difficult to accept their “self” which contradicted the dominant heterosexual structure. According to Hogg, this is the process of depersonalization i.e. shifting the perception of self from being unique toward the perception of the self as a member of a social category. In this respect the “Me” becomes a “We” (Thoits&Virshup as cited in Stets & Burke, 1997: 32) i.e. an individual sees herself/ himself as the embodiment of the in-group prototype rather than as a unique individual. Stryker’s work also highlights that identities exist within and reflect social structure (Stets & Burke 1997: 32).

For instance, Ram who identifies as a gay told, “I see myself in a larger whole. I know having such orientation is normal but in relation to others (heterosexuals) perspective, having such orientation is unacceptable. So, I hide my orientation for acceptance in the society”. For people like him, social structure and position persist and develop according to social principle. Individuals are recruited into positions and they can even leave positions, but for the most part 'the positions' remain there and maintain its legacy.

However, there is also the concept of agency (Stets & Burke 1997:9). As agents, there are LGBT persons who are critical of the existing normative pattern. For example, Chandra who identifies as a male-to-female transgender<sup>16</sup> told, “We do exist and our existence is not acknowledged in the society. Therefore, the present structure needs to be reformed and we (referring to LGBTI persons) are the people working hard to reform these pre dominant structures existing in the society”. These individuals who facilitate for further development of social structure as change agents give priority to acceptance of their new “self”.

According to Higgins, self-discrepancy theory, negative emotion results from a discrepancy between one’s actual state and one’s ideal state (Stets and Burke 1997:21). In this respect, those LGBTI persons, who are partially

open, are compelled to have two different statuses, which do not meet at any point. For instance, during an interview, Shikhar in a sad tone said, “I am bound to be a male because I was born as a male, though I prefer to be a male-to-female transgender. I always have a conflict going on and I feel it would be better if I commit suicide because it is very difficult to handle at times”. Further, Saurav who identifies as a gay told, “Our life is like a drama as depending upon the situation we need to act. For instance, I have two identities i.e. identity of a heterosexual man and identity of a homosexual man. To meet the role of two different identities, I have two different cell phone and two different voices. Now imagine how difficult it is for me to maintain these two complex identities. Until now I have managed but I don’t think I can take this longer. I often think that it would be better if I commit suicide”.

Supporting to his friends' (Shikhar and Saurav) arguments Sangam, who identifies as a bisexual told, “I feel guilty for lying as I have pretended to be a heterosexual all my life. I have a wife and she hardly has any clue about my orientation. Neither can I say I have attraction for the same sex nor can I control my behavior. My life is really miserable and I know I will have to pay for it in one form or the other”.

Hence, their inability to live according to their actual state has resulted into negative emotions. The findings indicate that the psychological distresses experienced by LGBTI persons are strongly associated with presumed heterosexuality, homophobia, prejudice and victimization.

### **Incidences of Discrimination**

BDS has become a common place for LGBTI persons coming from different region, caste, religion and ethnic background. It has been observed that diversified group of individuals from different walks of life have been working in the organization but all of them have had similar stories of oppression, ostracism and humiliation.

For individuals who have opened up regarding their gender identity and sexual orientation, nature of discrimination is found almost similar. However, the degree of oppression and discrimination varies. Unlike transgender persons, gays and lesbians claimed that they did not face much discrimination in the society as their transgender counterparts.

Participants involved in the study belonged to outside of Kathmandu valley, mostly in rural areas, where villagers hardly had any clue about same sex and different gender. When people with such propensity started to exhibit different behavior than expected, they were forced by their family members to act according to the biological sex. This kind of pressure compelled many to leave home and live on their own. For instance, Binod a female-to-male transgender<sup>17</sup> in a sad tone told, “I tried to convince my parents that I didn’t



want to marry at that point of time but I was forced and there was not anything that I could do than leaving home”.

Smile on a face but with watery eyes, Sangita a male to female transgender said, “Once I was in a public transport, coming to my office and I could see people staring at my physique and appearance. They could perhaps figure out that I was a transgender. When I was about to get off from the microbus, the conductor said ‘these kind of *Chakkas*<sup>18</sup> have also started to walk openly’ ”.

However, findings suggest that after the historic ruling, the violence and discrimination against LGBTI have declined. Leading advocate Sunil Babu Pant in an interview<sup>19</sup> said, “The violence has gone down dramatically, especially from the police and security forces. In general, we used to face the most violence from the security forces, not from the general public. That has been resolved now, especially after the Supreme Court decision. Now police invite us for sensitization trainings; they ask us if we need protection when we organize programs. At the ground level, a lot of LGBTI persons are getting confidence and have started showing pride on what they are. They have even started accepting themselves as individuals with a differing gender identity. They carry themselves beautifully than ever with dignity and pride. Their families have even started supporting them and accepting the reality”.

However, it was also realized by the participants of the study that homosexuals and transgender persons were treated badly because they gave rest of the society a chance to point fingers at them. It is believed that they get involved in an illegitimate activities and show unacceptable behavior like wearing appealing dresses even in the public places, talking loudly and making noise while walking on the streets. For instance, Sumitra a male-to-female transgender very boldly stated, “We (referring to LGBTI community) are aware why we are perceived differently by heterosexuals. They think we get involved in illegitimate activities and are immoral, but we need to make them understand by proving that things cannot be generalized for all. We can be as good as heterosexuals. They say so because we give them a chance to say. So, we should limit our behavior and act decently”.

On the other hand, participants were also critical of heterosexuals who visit Thamel<sup>20</sup> to get hold of people like them without getting labeled as such. Urvashi a male-to-female transgender very angrily said, “Why we are only blamed for prostitution when heterosexuals are the ones visiting such places? Hence, I don’t think we are *chakkas* rather they are *chakkas* who have been deceiving their family and society”.

During the fieldwork, the researcher interacted with many heterosexuals, who were involved in different programs related to LGBTI persons. During the period, it was observed that few heterosexuals tended to trivialize the issue of LGBTI community. LGBT involved in the study believed that LGBTI persons are taken for granted by the society at large. For instance,

Saurav who identifies as a gay pertinently expressed his sentiments “*achanoko peer khukurilae jandaina*” implying that only those who experience prejudice can understand the actual pain of it.

### **Strategies adopted to cope with the situation**

Those LGBT persons who have been part of the LGBTI movement and have been involved with BDS were aware that they should handle homophobic situation sensibly. They have even acknowledged the fact that their everyday life is very uncertain and hence should be prepared to face any sort of challenges. Those participants who are out in the media have faced bitter experiences in terms of further exclusion from society, family and peers, which according to them was expected to a large extent. The findings suggest that LGBT persons expected the sense of marginalization that they would face after they “come out” of the closet. For instance, Biswas a female-to-male transgender said, “Last week only I disclosed my identity in the media. Since then, I have noticed that my friends, particularly heterosexuals have changed their behavior towards me. It hurts but its fine as I have my own life and I don’t regret for being different”. Further, Shanta, who identifies as a lesbian without any fuss said, “We are used to homophobic comments and it’s not a big deal. Earlier, we used to get hurt but now I have realized that heterosexuals are ignorant about our issues. So, instead of getting hurt we should rather try to convince them”.

For all the participants, different gender identity and orientation is a reality. They have acknowledged that they have to live with it and cannot alter it. Therefore, they are adopting different ways to meet their interest. Those who are “out of the closet”, think they cannot have an enduring relationship because it is very difficult to find committed partner. So, majority of them wanted to adopt a child and create a family. For instance, Sumitra, a male-to-female transgender said that she wanted to adopt a child immediately but fears as people like them do not have proper legislation to adopt a child.

There were a couple of LGBT persons associated to BDS who actually were partners but have not been recognized as so in legal sphere. However, they have tried to portray the relationship wherever possible. Their friends and co-workers at the BDS address them as husband and wife. Most of them even have established a fictive relationship with each other. During an interview, Binod a female-to-male transgender pointing at Urvashi male-to-female transgender said, ‘She is my sister and I put her *tika* on the event of *Bhaitika*.<sup>21</sup>’ It was observed that participants have their own world in the workplace, where they have a greater comfort level.

### **Cost of Coming Out**

There are familial, economic, educational and social/cultural cost of “coming out”. Because of the false stereotypes and superfluous bigotry the process of coming out has always been challenging for all of participants. Majority of them have fear of being rejected by the family, friends, co-workers and society in general. It is observed that for individuals who dare to “come out of the closet” have to accept bumpy ride ahead in terms of discrimination and exclusion in the society, educational institution and workplaces.

Except few, most of the participants were rejected by the family, when their identity was revealed. For most of the participants, “coming out” meant being the targets of verbal abuse, discrimination and humiliation. For example, Sumitra a male-to-female transgender told, “If neighbour tells something bad to my family or if my siblings don’t get married, I am the only one at home to be blamed for the entire problem”. Likewise, Binod a female-to-male transgender in a sad tone told, “My family’s prestige is attached with my identity and I am blamed for degrading family’s image”. Further, Sumit a partially open gay poignantly said “For me, “coming out” means ruining the lives of my children. Therefore, I cannot afford to disclose my identity”.

Despite having exemplary service records, two of the participants were abandoned from their respective workplace after the identity was revealed. Likewise, most of the transgender persons had to give up their education at an early age for bending their respective gender roles. Therefore, the study findings suggest that even the small mark of their identity could result in exclusion and discrimination from the society.

### **Cost of being partially open/ hidden**

The findings also suggest that individuals who are partially open often have to pay the cost of being hidden more severely. For instance, those who are unable to come out because of failure to accept challenges ahead, the misery of having to live a life, which they do not belong to, is even harder. More than abuses from other members of the society, it becomes a matter of self – esteem and dignity at an individual level. In this sense, being hidden might even exacerbate their condition further.

For instance, Amrit who identifies as a gay in a sad tone told “Life is difficult when you feel like having to hide an important part of yourself”. It was revealed that those participants who are partially open are leading life of anxiety, fear and frustration. They are mentally depressed and often think of committing suicide or getting involved into illicit activities. Most of them are under medical consultation and few are under medication. Majority of the participants feel guilty for deceiving their family and friends. Younger gays and lesbians in particular are unable to concentrate on their studies and have poor academic records. Married gays, lesbians and transgenders on the other hand are leading miserable life of guilt and disgust.

In society like ours, where family's prestige is attached with member's identity, the pressure is always on individuals to hide their real "self" and live according to family's aspiration.

### **State's policy and LGBTI**

Nepal's national legal frameworks, as well as its international legal obligations, provide a good basis for addressing protection for sexual and gender minorities. For instance, in the Constitution of Nepal (1990) it is stated that state shall not discriminate the citizens on the basis of religion, color, sex, caste, ethnicity or conviction or any of these (Gurung, 2006). Further, there was a nascent LGBTI rights movement in Nepal after the 2007 Supreme Court's decision ordering the government to "formulate new laws and amend existing laws in order to uphold the rights of these people. Also, as Nepal has ratified more than 18 international conventions, state is obliged to endorse ratified international treaties and conventions as a national law and protect the rights of other minorities.

However, most of the participants opined that state has not been responsible to enact directives of the Supreme Court. A leading activist working on the issue of LGBTI firmly stated that because of some high level official's personal grievances, LGBTI persons are denied from the rights. Regardless of Supreme Court's directive until now, only two female-to-male transgender persons have managed to get the citizenship based on their different identity. A second female-to-male transgender in line to receive citizenship card based on gender identity reaffirmed that more than a system, it is up to individual's interest that often restrict LGBTI persons from getting their rights.

Of late, it has been a trend to include LGBTI persons issues in the manifestos of various political parties, which seems like a positive step forward. However, couple of participants critically told that inclusion of LGBTI issues in political manifestos does not necessarily mean that the members of respective political parties take LGBTI persons with respect. There are many prominent leaders who are still reluctant to understand LGBTI problem of citizenship and identity.

All of the participants believed that if state initiates to take action against people making homophobic comments, heterosexuals in due course will stop discriminating and intimidating them. Hence, state / government have been perceived as influential institution that should have been more responsible in sensitizing the issues of LGBTI to general masses.

However, entire participants believed that their situation has improved compared to last five years. Sumitra a male-to-female transgender said, "Things have improved significantly after the Supreme Court's decision i.e. we are no longer harassed the way we used to be by the police and all".

Similarly, a lawyer working at the BDS said that after the landmark decision, although some of the government mechanism and officials do not want to incorporate LGBTI issues, they are still obliged to address it. For instance, the issue of transgender ideally had to be looked after by Ministry of Law and Justice. However, the agenda was shifted to the domain of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare but was not avoided. This itself is an achievement looking at how reluctant officials were in the beginning.

Nevertheless, many LGBT persons still do not have conducive environment to disclose their identity. . For example, Akash who identifies as a gay told, “At the moment everything is so uncertain in the country including constitution drafting process. Although, the Supreme Court has recognized us and has shown a positive way forward, changes are yet to be observed at individual level amongst general heterosexual community. Hence, I don’t dare to disclose my identity because of uncertainty”

#### **Lesbian, Gay and their level of access to Education**

A general theme of the finding delineates the fact that depending upon ones sexuality and gender identity, educational level varies. For instance, lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGB) had better educational status than transgender persons. They have managed to enjoy better status in society including schools and colleges because they did not have to disclose orientation while acquiring education. Moreover, they look like heterosexual male and female in physical appearance and hence did not have many problems in developing their social circle amongst heterosexuals. However, most of them have had poor academics because all their life, primary concern has been to "come out of the closet" and find right partners based on their interest. This often hindered them from concentrating on studies and plan for better future ahead.

For instance, Akash who identifies as a gay told, “Instead of focusing on studies I often think whether my parents will accept my orientation or not after all I am their only son and will I be able to find a partner who would genuinely understand me and my feelings. At times I get so frustrated and I feel like committing suicide”. Supporting Akash’s view, Saurav who also identifies as a gay in a sad tone said, “I go to the college but I am least interested on studies because I cannot be a real “me” and I have realized that life is difficult when you feel like having to hide an important part of yourself”. Further, Ram who is also a gay poignantly said, “My male friends can easily express their feeling for a girl but I cannot express the kind of feeling that I have for boys. Moreover, I cannot express my feeling with anyone around. Therefore, I concentrate more on my interest than on studies”. Rakesh who identifies as a gay further added and told,<sup>22</sup> “Those of us who are in the closet often think of committing suicide or getting involved in an illicit activities as it is very hard for us to concentrate on studies. So, most of us are under medical consultation and medication”.

A lawyer working at the BDS said, “There are many cases of abandonment of gays, lesbians and transgender persons from the school for acting differently. I have come across couple of suicidal cases where most of them had committed suicide because of the homophobic comments made by teachers and friends. The study findings suggest that intense bullying and harassment these minorities experience in the school setting has led many to have declining academic performance and high school drop out rates.

### **Transgender and issues of education**

The findings suggest that most of the transgender participants did not even complete their high school (SLC equivalent). For most of the participants, it was difficult to give up their internal feelings, interests and desire. To continue studies, they had to give up their identity and most of them had given priority to their different gender identity than to their studies. Urvashi a male-to-female transgender working in a human right sector at the BDS in a low voice said “I always wanted to study but I was weak in Math and whenever I approached a teacher for assistance then he used to scold me and often used to ask difficult questions to harass me. So, I did not feel like continuing studies and left school at class nine”. Further she told, “Professionally I am doing so well and today I can talk on the various issues of human rights and often people think I am highly educated but they get shock when I say I am not even high school graduate. Therefore, I am regretting on not having higher education but I am now determined to continue studies”. Likewise, a male-to-female transgender, Sumitra very confidently said, “We are often bullied by teachers and friends for looking different and it is difficult to continue studies as the environment is very stressful. However, if I am allowed to enroll in a college then I am ready to confront all the homophobic comments”.

It is evident that most of the transgender participants have had the experience of being bullied by the teachers. Urvashi a male-to-female transgender assertively told, “Had I known about the fundamentals of human rights back then, I would have definitely filed a case against such teaching system”. Ravi, a gay working at the FSGMN (Federation of sexual and gender minorities, Nepal) said, “Recently one of the colleges of the valley announced scholarship program for transgender students for the master level program but unfortunately transgender persons have not reached that level as most of them are not even high school graduates”.

Even amongst transgender students, male-to-female transgenders are vulnerable because they were extremely mortified by peers and teachers for showing feminine character and bending their respective gender roles. Biswas a female-to-male transgender deliberately said, “I can easily go to college and study because in the Nepalese society even a girl can have short hair and wear pant. However, if a person with a masculine physique wears

feminine dress then, it becomes a matter of shame". So, it is difficult for male-to-female transgender persons to continue studies. However, female-to-male transgender students also have their own grievances as colleges of the valley do not have transgender friendly facilities. ”

### **Employment Issues of LGBTI**

The findings also suggest that “coming out of the closet” not only means having limited access to educational opportunities but also means having limited access and control over employment opportunities. This fact primarily is the main reason why many people with such orientation and gender identity choose to be into the closet. There are many reported cases of abandonment of LGBTI persons from their respective workplaces after the identity was disclosed. For instance, despite of having exemplary service records, two of my participants were abandoned from their respective workplaces after the identity was revealed.

A lesbian, who was dismissed from the workplace after her identity was disclosed said, “Others would lose job if they did not work efficiently but we would lose job if we don’t hide our orientation, which has nothing to do with our skills and capability”. Likewise, a female-to-male transgender who was abandoned from the workplace said, “I didn’t lose my job because I was incompetent. Quite the contrary, I worked hard and did my job very well. However, I was fired when the officer discovered that I was a transgender”.

Participants opined that most of them remain closeted as they have fear of losing jobs due to discrimination and, in addition, they have no legal recourse when discrimination occurs. Further, the very limited range of professional opportunities available to LGBTI persons has compelled many to work as a sex worker. Further, Urvashi noted, “Instead of being evaluated on the basis of skills and qualifications, LGBTI persons are judged on the basis of different sexual orientation and gender identity and are often not hired”.

BDS with some other INGOs particularly focusing on the issue of HIV/AIDS are solely providing employment opportunities to LGBTI persons who are "out" or are "partially out". All of them opined that it is difficult to get job with revealed identity. Until now very few have managed to work outside BDS with the revealed identity. Majority of the participants did not have an experience of applying for a job outside BDS. Couple of gays did work on some other places but all of them left because they did not think it was their niche. Most of the transgender participants were working in the Human Rights Department and gays/lesbians in particular were working as the Out Reach Educator (ORE). Therefore, in one form or the other BDS was providing spaces to all the participants irrespective of their qualification.

Ravi a gay referring to one of the male-to-female transgender said, “By working at the BDS she<sup>23</sup> is earning and has managed to look after her deserted mother. She is accepted as a daughter by her mother and she also has a respect in the family”. On the other hand, Saroj a partially open gay said, “Had I managed to have a regular source of income and if I was able to assist the family financially then I would have dared to come out of the closet at least in the family”.

These two cases exhibit the fact that those who are earning a bit and financially assisting the family could come out of the closet and lead contented life. However, those LGBT persons who are struggling to make a living have difficulty in "coming out of the closet" and leading respectful life. Rather they have the higher chance of getting involved in illegitimate activities. Therefore, if the job assurance is provided, then eventually the number of coming out will increase remarkably and these minorities could lead a respectful life.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that LGBTI persons are deprived of different opportunities at the same time. The disadvantages faced by LGBTI persons are interrelated and not mutually exclusive. Belonging to the LGBTI community means having poor familial relation, limited social contact, less education and fear of being unemployed.

Specifically, the findings suggest that LGBTI persons do not have favorable environment to acquire education and employment of their interest. High school dropout rates, many suicidal cases and thought of committing suicide makes it evident that LGBTI persons are not privileged to acquire education of their interest.

The study also indicates that economic independency determines the happier and healthier life of LGBT persons. But the fear of not getting job with a revealed identity has further exacerbated their condition and compelled many to remain closeted. Those LGBT persons who are financially assisting the family are leading life of content but those who are struggling to earn for themselves have the higher chance of getting involved in illegitimate activities. Also, limited social relation only with the community people seems to be the major factor responsible in deteriorating their condition.

### **Notes**

1. Researcher was awarded Matthias Moyersoen Research Apprenticeships, 2009 by Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF) to carry out research on the issues of LGBTI persons in Nepal
2. [http://www.fiertemontrealpride.com/2011/Droits\\_LGBT\\_EN\\_3aout2011\\_web.pdf](http://www.fiertemontrealpride.com/2011/Droits_LGBT_EN_3aout2011_web.pdf)



3. The Supreme Court on December 21, 2007 acknowledged growing ascendance of the notion that homosexuals and third gender people are not mentally ill or sexually perverts. Therefore, their rights should be protected and they should not be discriminated from the enjoyment of rights guaranteed by the constitution and human rights instruments. The Court further stated that it is an appropriate time to think about decriminalizing and de-stigmatizing the same sex marriage as according to it. It calls upon the state to create appropriate environment and make legal provisions to enable the LGBTI people enjoy fundamental rights and insert provisions in the New constitution to be made by the Constituent Assembly, guaranteeing nondiscrimination on the ground of 'gender identity' and the 'sexual orientation' besides 'sex' in line with the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa (as cited in Decision of the Supreme Court on the (LGBTI) people, 2008)
4. It is the *meti* community, which has been at the forefront of LGBTI struggles in Nepal and at the receiving end of much state and societal violence (Tehelka Magazine, Vol 5, Issue 2)
5. To admit to your family, friends and society after a period of secrecy, that you are a homosexual
6. In this paper life chances is defined as the level of opportunity that LGBTI persons have to acquire social network, education and employment.
7. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kyle-knight/nepal-third-gender\\_b\\_1303562.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kyle-knight/nepal-third-gender_b_1303562.html)
8. Personal communication, Ram Thapa, Feb1, 2011.
9. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kyle-knight/nepal-third-gender\\_b\\_1303562.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kyle-knight/nepal-third-gender_b_1303562.html)
10. Nepalese police arrested Sunil Babu Pant, along with 70 lesbians, gays, and transgendered people during a sit-in protest demanding citizenship rights (Sify News, Sep 14, 2010).
11. <http://www.sify.com/news/finally>
12. Researcher being an upper-caste, middle-class, urban Nepali hetero-sexual woman with sound educational background was viewed as someone who is completely different in every respect by the participants involved in the study.
13. Problem for studies of LGB individuals is that descriptive statistics about the characteristics of this population (e.g., its racial and educational demographics) is unavailable because the LGB population has never been appropriately enumerated (Blair, 1999). Despite improvements in the social environment of LGB individuals, LGBs have much to lose from disclosing their sexual minority status. With much to lose, LGBs may not be willing to disclose their identity to researchers (Meyer and Wilson, 2009: 23).
14. In attempting to study hidden populations for whom adequate lists and consequently sampling frames are not readily available, snowball sampling methodologies may be the only feasible methods available (Faugier and Sargeant, 2007:792).
15. The data collected in this study cannot be generalized in a wider level because the non-probability sampling has been employed.

16. A person who transitions from “male-to-female,” meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a “transgender woman (National Centre for transgender equality)
17. A person who transitions from “female-to-male” meaning a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a “transgender man” (National center for Transgender equality, 2009)
18. Derogatory term for LGBTI persons
19. Interview of Sunil Babu Pant with kaveri Rajaraman-  
<http://www.himalmag.com/component/authors/articles/Kaveri-Rajaraman.html>
20. Thamel is presumed to be the red light area.
21. *Bhaitika* is the last day of *Deepawali* celebrations in Nepal. It is the most important day and is also known as *Bhai tihar*. On this brother and sister day, sisters pray to *Yamraja* for her brother's long life and prosperity.
22. Referring to lesbians and gays who are unable to come out of the closet because of the social stigma
23. Referring to one of the successful MTF(TG), who is professionally doing well

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## IDENTITY CRISIS: A CASE STUDY OF NEWAR DALITS

**Mahesh Raj Maharjan**

### **Abstract**

*This study takes Newar Dalits as a special case of intersectionality of caste, ethnic, and Dalit identity. Based on interviews among members of Dyahla and Chyamkhalah castes in Kathmandu, it critically analyzes the logics for their claiming non-Dalit status and identity politics behind such claims and counterclaims. Their role as temple god-guardians has been found to be the main basis for rejection of Dalit identity by Dyahlas. Pro-Dalits reject Newar ethnic identity while anti-Dalits reject Newar Dalit identity on various grounds. The implicit rationale for this identity politics is to consolidate their respective identities in the wake of promulgation of a new constitution.*

### **Introduction**

Identity politics has become a major issue in Nepal since the People's Movement in 1990 in general and after the April 2006 People's Movement in particular, with Janajatis, Dalits, and Madhesis defining and redefining their identities and demanding inclusion. In both the Janajati and Dalit movements, the role of Newars, the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, has been crucial—and hence controversial—due to their simultaneous ethnic activism and caste system with untouchability. Thus, Newars can be considered a unique case of intersectionality of ethnic, caste, and Dalit identity.

The outward manifestation of this identity controversy began in 1997, when the Ministry of Local Development included the Newar castes of Khadgi, Kapali, Dyahla, and Chyamkhalah<sup>1</sup> as Dalits. Some leaders of these groups as well as Newar activists and intellectuals protested against this listing as Dalits, but some activists, mostly of Dyahla and Chyamkhalah castes, and Dalit leaders hailed it. Both pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits<sup>2</sup> have been battling this issue, and as of now, Khadgi, Kapali, and Dhobi have been removed from the list and are hence not Dalits, whereas Dyahla and Chyamkhalah have been retained.

This controversy has become a national issue, with ethnic and Dalit activists, politicians, and intellectuals divided over it and siding with one or the other, or being ambivalent. It has generated questions about whether there are (or were) Dalits in Newar society; whether being Dalit is a recent

phenomenon; and whether it is a conflict between ethnic identity and Dalit identity, or between Newars and non-Newars. The implications of this issue, particularly delisting from Dalit, are immense and far reaching, more for the Dalit movement than for the Newar ethnic movement. No study has been conducted yet into the causes and consequences for this non-Dalit status claim.

This paper<sup>3</sup> focuses on two issues related to the controversy: first, logics presented by these castes for their claim as non-Dalits and counterclaims by pro-Dalits; and second, identity politics behind this controversy. This study tries to show how pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits are manipulating and re-interpreting their social, cultural, economic, and historical realities and experiences to justify their claims, confirming that both Newar ethnic activists and Dalit activists are instrumentalists in establishing their respective identities. The paper starts with background discussion of the Newar caste system and multiplicity of Newar identities and the origin of controversy. The major finding of the research is that Dyahlas reject being called Dalits mainly by citing their cultural role as god-guardians of temples of Mother Goddesses, and their perceived elimination of caste-based discrimination. Pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits were found to have differing concepts of Dalit identity and Newar identity, with anti-Dalits focusing on dignity and pro-Dalits on benefits and special rights (to be) provided by the state. The implicit rationale for their claims seems to be to consolidate their respective identities in the wake of promulgation of the new constitution.

#### **Newar Caste System and Low Castes<sup>4</sup>**

Newars are “a Sanskritic, caste-based society” (Gellner 1991: 253), with various castes and sub-castes, which are more complex than that of Parbatiyas. There is considerable literature on Newars and Newar caste system (Chattopadhyay 1923; Nepali 1965; Hofer 1979; Slusser 1982; Gellner 1986, 1991, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1997b; Levy 1990; Quigley 1995; Parish 1993; Toffin 2007). Researchers on Newars point out two caste systems of Newars (Levy 1990; Parish 1993; Gellner 1995a). The Newar caste system has various untouchable castes. The *Muluki Ain* (Legal Code) of 1854 classified Newar low castes into two groups: “impure but touchables” and “untouchables.” Caste has no legal status since the *Muluki Ain* of 1963, and the state has identified untouchables of Nepal as Dalits. Simultaneously, Newars also are involved in ethnic activism, and the state has identified Newars as an ethnic group. The debate on which Newar low castes are Dalits, and also whether there are Dalits at all in Newar society, has ensued because

Dalits and Janajatis have been considered, arguably, mutually exclusive identities. Presently, the Nepalese state has identified the two castes of Dyahla and Chyamkhalah as Dalits by their inclusion in Dalit list.

Dyahlas are the principal, and more numerous, group among the untouchables, with population of less than 3 percent of the total Newars.<sup>5</sup> They live outside the city walls, with no agricultural land. Presently, most of the Dyahlas do cleaning job in municipality garbage collection centres and public and private offices. Economically, they were the poorest sections of Newars, though mainly due to the cleaning jobs they are now non-poor. They were fishermen and basket-makers, used to rear pigs, and were executioners.<sup>6</sup> They also serve as god-guardians at shrines or temples of Mother Goddesses. They have important "ritual" functions as accumulators of pollution (Levy 1990: 85). Most Dyahlas use "Dyahla" or "Deula" or "Dyola" as their surname; some use "Pode" and "Pujari"; and some use "Matangi" (see Levy 1990: 84).

Chyamkhalahs lie at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. They are also sweepers and do cleaning jobs like Dyahlas. Dyahlas and other Newars consider Chyamkhalah to be lower than Dyahlas as Chyamkhalah take their death offerings. They, like Dyahlas, live outside the old city wall boundaries and have no agricultural land. The major difference between them and Dyahlas is that they do not serve as temple guardians,<sup>7</sup> and they have no ritual function in Newar society. Also, the function of Dyahlas as temple guardians makes them higher than the Chyamkhalah. In Sawal Bahal, Dyahlas invariably regarded them as lower. Two of my Dyahla informants considered Chyamkhalah as Dalits along with the Parbatiya low castes of Kami, Sarki, and Damai, even though they insisted that Newars cannot have Dalits. However, one Chyamkhalah woman remarked, "We don't eat what they touch, they don't eat what we touch," indicating the ambivalence of relative position, if not equality, of Chyamkhalah.

The caste of Harahuru, or Halahulu, is now an empty category, filled, according to Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah, by beggars, Newars and others, who have been expelled from the status system. They are said to take death offerings. Parish (1993: 116) calls it a "fantasy" group.

### **Newar Identity and Dalit Controversy**

Toffin (2007) sees Newars as a classic example of multiple social identity formation, both ethnic and caste identity. To this, of course, we also need to add Dalit identity for some Newar castes. According to him, Newar society was formed by the "process of ethnicization of a culturally and economically

highly differentiated group of people who had initially different origins but settled in one special region, the Kathmandu Valley (Toffin 2007: 361),” who “then started to adopt the same language...the same cultural features, and the same civilization.” He asserts that the threat of Gorkhalis probably contributed to an expression of Newar ethnic identity (2007: 361).

Likewise, Quigley (1987: 168, quoted in Gellner 1997b: 153-154), taking a strong modernist standpoint, asserts that Newar identity only arose with the threat of Gorkhali conquest in the 17th century, and “[I]n the pre-Gorkhali history of the Kathmandu Valley...the idea of ethnic identity is irrelevant.” Moreover, Gellner (1997b: 155) traces the origin of modern Newar identity back to the Malla period.

Gellner (1997b: 165) attributes the modern awareness of being Newar in a large part to “a feeling of difference from, and resentment at, the dominant Parbatiyas, a feeling which seems to be shared by all Newars, despite all the other factors of caste, religion, dialect, and locality which serve to keep them apart.” Toffin (2007: 361) also notes that the growth of Newar identity was accelerated due to the policies of the *Khas* Hindu rulers from the end of the 18th century, and they become more exclusive and closed than it had been before.

As a protest against the relegation to subordinate position by the Rana and Panchayat regimes, “Newar cultural nationalism” (Gellner 1997b) grew in the Panchayat period mainly as a literary and linguistic movement against the restriction of use of Newari as literary language. But this culturally expressed rebellion metamorphosed into Newar ethnic identity only after the establishment of *Nepal Janajati Mahasangh* (Nepal Federation of Nationalities) in 1990, although the ethnicity of Newars has been challenged from time to time, which will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Newar activists sometimes overemphasize “tribal” origin of Newars to align Newar identity with the indigenous movement, ignoring the fact that Newar society has clearly been redesigned and restructured over the years, mainly along the Indian Hindu lines. This dichotomy between “tribal” and “Hindu” features has been refuted by many (Sharma 1978; Hofer 1979). Moreover, Gellner (1991: 270) proposes that the Hindu-tribal dichotomy should be replaced by trichotomy, that is, between “tribal system,” “Newar system,” and “North Indian Brahmanic system.” Moreover, the origination stories of many Newar castes dismiss the notion of such tribal features; however,



Toffin (1984/2007: 149) recognizes this “tribal substratum” in Swagumi, a Jyapu group.

Parish (1993: 113) notes, while discussing social mobility and identity, that in Newar lower castes even multiple ethnic identities are possible, to avoid being attributed their low status, and this is possible because a person is not fixed in social space at the bottom of Newar caste system. Also, Gellner (1997b: 164) observes that even today, due to extreme stigmatisation, the lowest castes such as Khadgi and most of the Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah caste do not consider themselves Newars. However, people of these castes speaking Nepali rather than Newari language and their women piercing the nose, on interviews with my respondents, seem, to have the objective more of “hiding” their caste status than rejecting the Newar identity.

### **Caste Identity**

Of equal importance is Newar caste identity, which makes Newar ethnic identity a diffuse one. Of the low castes, Khadgis claim their descent from king Harisimhadeva (Lie 1999: 137, Gellner 1995b: 273, Parish 1993: 123); Kapalis descended from Kanphata or Nath yogis (Gellner 1995b: 279); and even the myth of Dyahlas make them immigrants from the Indian plains (Gellner 1995b: 291). Moreover, Gellner (1997b: 151), while discussing the political inclination of Newars, doubts unity of Newars due to the seemingly greater importance of caste identity: “Newars, unlike other ethnic groups, are too divided by caste for it even to be thinkable that they should unite as Newars.” But this doubt has to some extent been repelled by formation of the Nepa Rastriya Party and its albeit one seat in the Constituent Assembly election in 2008, and the support of all castes for Newa Autonomous Region.

The rise of caste identity can be demonstrated by caste-based organisations of almost all castes, which are mainly aimed at preserving their own caste’s cultures. This changing nature of caste, with emphasis on caste independence rather than on interdependence, termed “substantialisation” by Louis Dumont (1980), has been applied to Newars castes (Gellner 1995a: 34; Quigley 1995: 321; Parish 1993; Toffin 2007: 363, 378).

### **Dalit Identity**

The identification of Newar low castes with Dalit—although the term Dalit was not used then—can be traced to the Nepalese Dalit movement itself. The leadership and participation of Newar low castes in Dalit movement of Nepal can be identified from the beginning of such movements (Kisan 2005). Saharshanath Kapali founded Tailor’s Union in 1947, one of the first Dalit

organisations, mainly to enhance tailor profession of Kapalis but also to teach about caste discrimination (p. 91), and continued forming and reforming organisations into the 1960s. Kapalis and Khadgi were in the forefront and leading role in the struggle to enter Pashupatinath temple in 1952 (INSEC 1993). Many Kapalis were leading the Dalit movement in the 1980s, although the bulk of Dalit leaders were from the Hill and Dalit castes (Kisan 2005: 82–111). Moreover, the membership, albeit low, of Newar low castes in central committees of various Dalit organisations (Kisan 2005), both party-affiliated and non-affiliated, after the 1990 People's Movement can be regarded as an important role played by Newar castes in the Dalit movement and hence their identification as Dalits. Of note, there was also a Dyahla member in the National Dalit Commission from 2011 to 2012.

The term “Newar Dalit<sup>8</sup>” has been used by many Dalit scholars and activists (Ahuti 2010; Kharel 2010; ILO 2005; Dahal et al 2002; NDC 2010) to differentiate it from Madhesi Dalit and Hill Dalit in classification of Dalits. The term indicates that there have been, and are, Dalits in the Newar society. Since Newar activists strongly dislike the term, they refrain from using it.

#### **“Newar Dalit” Controversy**

The controversy of whether to call the low castes in Newar society as Dalits, and whether there are Dalits in the Newar society, began when *Uppechhit, Utpidit ra Dalitbarga Utthan Bikas Samiti* (Ignored, Oppressed, and Dalit Class Upliftment Development Committee) in 1997, under the Ministry of Local Development, included the Newar castes of Khadgi, Kapali, Dhobi, Dyahla, and Chyamkhalah in their 22 Dalit caste list. These caste groups and Newar activists protested against the inclusion and asked for removal from the list, while some activists of Chyamkhalah and Dyahla groups lobbied for inclusion as Dalits. Later, the draft bill of the National Dalit Commission (NDC) in 2002 identified Khadgi, Kapali, Dyahla, Chyamkhalah, and Dhobi as Dalits. Again, this inclusion into Dalit list was protested and the Commission later dropped them from the list.

Currently, NDC defines Dalits as those “who have been left behind in social, economic, educational, political and religious spheres and deprived of human dignity and social justice due to caste based discrimination and untouchability... ‘Caste-based Untouchability’ refers to those communities, who have been discriminated against as water polluting, or touching whom requires purification, untouchables or...any community that was identified as untouchable before the promulgation of the New Civil Code, 1963.” Based on this definition, NDC identifies the two Newar castes, Dyahla and

Chyamkhalah, as Dalits. Newar activists have been asking for removal of these castes from the list, but Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah themselves are divided in this issue.

This controversy of Dalit identity, from 1997 onwards, has been pointed out by many scholars, but no serious study or debate has been carried out as to why they are rejecting to be called Dalits. Kapali (2001) opposes the term Dalit and sees it as the main obstacle for equality. Bhattachan (2003: 6) recognizes the controversy on the use of the term Dalit itself in relation to “Newar Dalit” issue. ILO (2005: 17) notes that in recent years, Pode and Chyame have increasingly tended to remain outside the Dalit fold. Cameron (2007: 16) notes this as a special case, thus making Newar identity unlike other minorities in Nepal. Kathmandu Charter of Dalit Rights 2007 (English version, included in UNDP 2008: 12) includes the Madhesi Dalits in “especially depressed category” but there is no mention of “Newar Dalits.” UNDP (2008: 22) mentions the complications of inclusion of Newar low castes in the Dalit list and reports that leaders of organisations of Kapali, Chyame, and Pode have identified themselves as Newars and therefore the National Dalit Commission has dropped them from its list. IIDS (2008: 14) defers such dispute to be resolved through right to self-determination by the respective communities.

Kharel (2010), in her study of Dyahla neighbourhood located close to the Kathmandu Airport, explores the intersectionality of caste, class, and ethnicity. Her concern is on the ambiguity of Newar activists towards the Sweeper<sup>9</sup> castes who still face caste-based discrimination in their everyday lives, for example because of one’s stigmatized occupation, and yet not allowing them to identify themselves as Dalits, in which they fit (p. 25). She voices serious concerns about the long-term consequences if the Dyahla community lost their Dalit status, especially if the new constitution has a more favourable proportional representation/affirmative action policy for Dalits (p. 26). She supports their inclusion as Dalits and accuses that Newar activists in their fight for cultural and linguistic rights are trying to “trump” the caste status of communities like Dyahlas (p. 26). She even questions whether the Dyahla caste fits in the Newar indigenous movement (p. 24).

None of the authors, however, of *Newa Samaj* (Newar Society), which was intended as a caste profile of Newars, published in 2007 by *Newa Dey Daboo* (Newar National Forum), mentions the word “Dalit” or even “low caste,” which is in line with the organisation’s strong activism against the notion of “Newar Dalit” and caste hierarchy. Malla K. Sundar, the then chairman, writing in Preface, acknowledges the exclusion of some caste

groups: “From the third working committee, *Newa Dey Daboo* began to move toward elimination of discrimination and promote solidarity by including the so-called Dalits into Central Committee and delisting of those so-called Dalits.”

### **Logics for Rejection of Dalit Identity**

One of the objectives of this study has been to inquire on what bases or logics Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah are rejecting their Dalit identity. They provided cultural-ritual (e.g., their role as god-guardians); social (e.g., elimination of untouchability, increasing inter-caste marriages, and social change); economic (e.g., non-poor status); and historical (e.g., *Adivasi/Janajati* [aboriginal/indigenous] status) bases for such claims. We will next examine these logics critically, relating them to previous literatures, and conclude that they involve re-interpretation and distortion of events and perceptions and are part of identity politics to bolster their own identities.

*God-guardians*: The unanimous explanation which all my Dyahla informants gave for rejection of being Dalits is their role as god-guardians of shrines or temples of Mother Goddesses located outside the city, which are often associated with or near a cremation ground. This role has been highlighted and popularized by Newar activists as “priest” in their bid to reject the Dalit status, along with adoption of “Pujari” surname by some Dyahlas as evidence of their priestly function. Although this function is culturally and, at present, economically more significant, it has not been given much attention by anthropologists on Newars.<sup>10</sup> If we consider temple entry movement as one of the most important forms of protest by Dalits, both in India and Nepal, such as the successful campaign to allow Dalits into the Pashupatinath Temple in 1954, then the claim of non-Dalit status by Dyahlas is justified.

This claim, however, has been countered by pro-Dalits on several grounds. Nirmal, a former member of NDC and a pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga, near the Kathmandu Airport, told me that they were not priests—as some of my anti-Dalit informants would like to call themselves—but merely “security guards.” Rather, Karmacharyas are the priests and do *nitya puja* (regular worship). He added that 40 to 50 years ago these shrines were frightening places with jungles around; thus their role as guardians was an “insult”: “Had we been honoured, we would have been put in Pashupati.” He lamented that they had no role in the institutions that carried out the temple activities, such as *guthi* (trust established to look after religious property and

for religious performances, organized either at kinship or village level) and committees. Moreover, pro-Dalits consider this role of cleaning the temple, taking the offerings, and providing security of the temple as an extension of their cleaning work (see Levy 1990: 368). He reported discrimination even inside these temples; they are not allowed inside when the Karmacharya priest does *nitya puja*, and that in the Dakshinkali temple, there is discrimination in distribution of the offerings.<sup>11</sup> In Dalit Sandesh (2011: 21-23), Ahuti, a Dalit intellectual, claims that Dyahlas have been god-guardians from the Kirati period, a role which the Lichhavi did not intervene in because the conquerors did not know how to worship them; later, Dyahlas were made untouchables. Thus, as in South India, “it is not polluting to accept the deity’s bleed substance (*prasad*) from their hands” (Dirks 1987: 278, cited in Gellner 1992: 52). Slusser (1982: 341) relates this role as “very likely a corollary of tantric practice in which caste distinctions were purposely abrogated.”

The concept of priest needs to be analyzed here. Among Newars, as in India, there is a correspondence between caste hierarchy and divine hierarchy (Gellner 1992: 78-79, 1988: 95-96; Toffin 1984: 598). Gellner regards Dyahlas as temple priests, temple priests being “the regular guardians of the cult of a given deity” and also “those who specialize in maintaining cults” (1988: 96-97). Levy (1990, Ch. 10) calls Dyahlas “para-priests,” along with Kapalis, for their pollution-accumulating function, as contrasted to other high-caste priests.

Pro-Dalits also claim that Dyahlas until recently were denied entry to temples like Pashupatinath, Budhanilkantha, and even Swoyambhu, and my informants confirmed it. Anti-Dalits defend this by saying that they do not visit temples where the king himself would not go<sup>12</sup> and that it cannot be considered as discrimination.

Besides, Dyahlas, as god-guardians, carry the idol of the Mother Goddesses from the temple and put it in the *kha* (palanquin) to initiate the *jatra* procession. Many Dyahlas report that during Mahalaxmi *Jatra* in Kagatigaun, a village in the southern part of Kathmandu, Dyahlas from Sawal Bahal are essential and are invited to initiate the *jatra* by sacrificing a buffalo and worshipping the deity. In Kirtipur, during Indrayani *Jatra*, the Dyahla *thakali* (elder) is honoured by placing highest in the row along with other Newars during the feast and thus given the highest status. However, pro-Dalit activists consider it ridiculous to honour them only one day in a year and discriminate them the rest of 364 days. This can be regarded as exclusionary inclusion of Dyahlas culturally, a feature of caste system.

Another issue related to their god-guardian status is that elder Dyahlas say that in the past religious people of higher castes would not even step in their shadows. One informant from Sawal Bahal, Dilbabu, related to me how a high-caste man did not approach him for the fear that he stepped in the shadow of the Dyahla, saying that it amounted to stepping into an image of god. Dyahlas take pride in saying that they have a hair of god Shiva in their head. Whether this is a manipulation or inversion of the extreme ostracisation of Dalits in India—where casting of shadows of untouchables on higher caste people amounted to touching—is not clear. But there is every reason to believe that some religious people did, and still do, have respect for Dyahlas due to their relation with gods. He also told me about how he had given *prasad* (offering) to the late King Birendra many years ago; he says, so high a caste cannot be considered a Dalit.

This association with blood-drinking divinities, gods, and death supports the belief that they have tantric power. One of my female informants, a medium, remarked that god had possessed her and other Dyahlas because “the god could not see the Dyahla being oppressed.” Unlike the shamanism and faith-healing of Indian low castes and of Parbatiya low castes, which has been considered as attempts to resist the caste hierarchy (Folmar 2007: 44, 48), Dyahlas consider it “natural” to become possessed and derive powers due to their cultural association with deities.

This controversy seems to have reached yet another level. The pro-Dalit Dyahla leader from Tilganga, Nirmal, blamed that some Newar activists—claiming that if Dyahlas considered themselves as Dalits, then they cannot be temple priests—were threatening to remove Dyahlas from their god-guardian privilege if they do not call themselves Janajatis and decide to remain Dalits. Two of my informants in Sawal Bahal had heard such rumour and one even indirectly supported such action. This is a serious issue and reflects the high animosity between the two opposite groups. Decisions on such ancestral rights<sup>13</sup> certainly should be of no concern to other Newars, and this obviously reflects high-caste Newar domination and interference, which is precisely what Dyahlas reject and struggle against.

Another point raised by pro-Dalits which is worth mentioning is that they consider the fact that Vajracharyas do not come to serve as their priest as a form of discrimination. Pro-Dalits leaders told me, rhetorically, that they would consider themselves Janajatis if Vajracharyas came and served as their priests. This reflects their vent at their “cultural exclusion,” as some pro-Dalits see it. But such argument is not tenable. On the one hand, Newar low castes have priests of their own caste, and they take pride in it. On the other

hand, Vajracharyas are Buddhist priests and cannot serve as a priest for Hindu Dyahlas. Shankar Kapali, chairman of Kapali Samaj, the organisation of Kapalis, related how, when requested to do priestly function for *janko*, life-cycle ritual for elders, for his father, a Shakya man answered that he was willing but his performing the rituals would be different, although the goal was the same, and that the Kapali's own priest would serve well. Moreover, service by a priest cannot be obligatory (See Gellner 1988 for discussion of Newar priesthood).

*Untouchability:* Untouchability is the hallmark of Dalit identity, and all scholars studying Nepal and Newars agree that there is untouchability in Newar society. All of my informants, both pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits, had experienced various forms of untouchability and discrimination in their lives. Yet, we have this anti-Dalit movement by some Dyahlas themselves, backed by Newar ethnic activists and intellectuals, and opposed by some Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah and non-Newar Dalits. This has ushered a debate on critical analysis of untouchability itself.

Dyahlas, but not Chyamkhalah, have both polluting and non-polluting roles. Ritually, as god-guardians and during *jatras*, they are non-polluting, but at all other social and cultural occasions they are polluting. My informants were puzzled by this dualism. One elder Dyahla woman from Sawal Bahal was surprised ("*achamma*") that people of all castes took the *prasad* from their hands while they were inside the temple and were honoured as Dyahla or Dyahpala (god guardian), but once outside the temple they became untouchables. However, this has been the case also in south India (Dirks 1987: 278, cited in Gellner 1992: 52), where it is not polluting to accept the deity's *prasad* from untouchables.

All of my informants, both pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits, agree that untouchability has diminished markedly in the Kathmandu Valley. An ex-soldier from Kirtipur, Dhan, reported that it has decreased 95%. Anti-Dalits see this as a prelude to reject the Dalit identity. In contrast, pro-Dalits, and Dalits in general, offer several conceptual and empirical evidences that it exists.

First, they assert that Dalit identity is generally defined by untouchability—so does NDC—but it goes beyond and includes political, social, and economic disabilities. So unless and until all these disabilities are overcome, through special reservations and positive discrimination measures by the state, their identity and their struggle will continue. Although temporal nature of Dalit identity has been acknowledged by pro-Dalits (see Ahuti

2010: 152–153), the pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga, Nirmal, equated Dalit identity, exaggeratingly, to that of male and female identity, which he says “will not change.”

Second, pro-Dalits provide examples of untouchability and discrimination against them as evidence of prevalence and persistence of discrimination. (There is currently one case filed at NDC by a Kapali.) Nirmal, the pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga, emphasises that even if untouchability is eradicated in other societies, it will not be so among Newars because it is embedded in Newar culture and ritual.<sup>14</sup> Anti-Dalits consider them as anecdotal cases and argue that discrimination in Nepal—if it is not eradicated in India even after more than half a century of reservation—will take far more time to be eliminated, and hence they reject the Dalit “label.” Moreover, in 2008, during *Newa Divas*,<sup>15</sup> organisations of different Newars castes, including Dyahla organisations, declared that all Newars are equal; that there is no caste hierarchy and untouchability and discrimination in Newar society; that Dalit is not defined in Newar society; and that there is unity in diversity.

Third, pro-Dalits maintain that, though in the Kathmandu Valley untouchability and discrimination may have been reduced, outside it Dyahlas suffer unabated, so they have a duty to speak on their behalf also. NDC (2010) reports evidences of various such discriminations outside the Valley.

Lastly, Newar activists and intellectuals argue that Sthiti Malla imposed caste system on Newars and that he divided Newars into occupational castes not vertically along a hierarchy but horizontally, and untouchability was imposed later, mainly by the Rana regime. This is obviously not true, as there is general agreement among scholars of Nepal that caste system, and by extension untouchability, was present in the Lichhavi period and became more rigid after subordination to Shah rulers, and hence their cultural conservatism (Gellner 1998; see also ILO 2005: 18–19; Parish 1993).

*“Inter-caste” marriage:* In Kirtipur, I found four “inter-caste” marriages, or more appropriately Dalit–non-Dalit marriages, two in a single household of a Dyahla activist, Gyan, who now prefers to remain out of the controversy. In Sawal Bahal, a Chyamkhalah family had given two daughters away in such marriage, one with a Kapali and another to a Brahman, both outside the Valley. The one with the Kapali husband was having problems with entry into the *guthi*, while the other one had no problem, suggesting cultural conservatism of Newars. Obviously, marrying a girl into a high caste is not problematic, but marrying a high-caste girl into a Dyahla family is. Dyahlas agree that such “inter-caste” marriages are increasing, although very few



families have completely accepted such marriages. All Dyahlas, including the elders, however, agree that now one can “take wife” of whatever caste one chooses and they do not object to it.

It is such cases that Dalits point to prove that there are Dalits in Newar society. Dalits and intellectuals view rejection or non-acceptance of such “inter-case” marriage as a “litmus test” for caste discrimination. However, anti-Dalits argue that gradual acceptance, albeit slow, is a sign that the caste system is slowly disappearing and they are not, or no longer, Dalits. They also argue that endogamy is preferred and exogamy despised not only by their castes but other Newar castes and Parbatiyas as well and thus cannot be a justification of Dalit status. Moreover, anti-Dalits say that before marrying other things besides caste are taken into consideration, and marriage is gradually becoming a decision of the marrying people themselves.

Another interesting rhetorical argument pro-Dalit activists make is that whether those Newar activists professing Janajati status are willing to give their daughters in marriage to Dyahlas. This seems to have been an approach to humiliate Newar activists whenever pro-Dalits discuss this non-Dalit issue with anti-Dalit Newar activists. Nirmal, the pro-Dalit leader, told me how he, in a heated conversation with a renowned Newar activist on the topic of this controversy, asked him if he would give his daughter in marriage with the Dyahla’s son. Then, the Newar activist replied, “Such things don’t make sense; if my daughter chooses, maybe. But it takes time.”

These two issues, elimination/prevalence of untouchability and acceptance/rejection of “inter-caste” marriages, suggest manipulation of social and cultural realities to their own political ends by both Dalit and Newar activists. Anti-Dalits focus on the Kathmandu Valley, where they are most numerous, and on social change and the present, while pro-Dalits focus not only inside the Valley but the whole Nepal as well as other Dalit castes and on the past and future. This opposing spatial and temporal orientation is an interesting feature in this debate.

*Cleaning occupation:* Colin Rosser (1966) is the main proponent of economic, materialist theory of caste in relation to Newars, who considered caste as a form of social stratification whereby the poor are of low caste and the rich are of high caste. He showed this by examining the social mobility of Jyapus to Shrestha status. But there has never been a direct correspondence between caste and occupation, neither in India (Eisenstardt 1970: 21) nor in Nepal. The correspondence of low caste status with poverty, however, is

evident in the case of Dyahlas, as in non-Newar low castes (Ahuti 2010: 111). Dyahlas are relatively poor, with no agricultural land,<sup>16</sup> very small houses, and, until some decades ago, no secure occupation. Currently, Dyahlas, both men and women, have the highest proportion of salaried employment in their traditional cleaning job (see Gellner 1995b). Nearly all Dyahlas in Kirtipur and most in Sawal Bahal are sweepers. But dwindling prospects for their occupation is a major concern. Now, they do not have monopoly in the cleaning business as they face fierce competition from other Newars and ethnic groups, and they do not have quota reserved in municipal rubbish collection work (see Dhakal 2008). All of my informants considered themselves as middle class.

They agreed that no one should be discriminated on the basis of occupation, but they had ambivalence about their traditional occupation. On the one hand, they felt threatened by gradual loss of their traditional job and hence livelihood. Yet they lamented that they had not been able to abandon their polluting job. On the other hand, they say that there is so much cleaning job that, if left only to Dyahlas to do it, it could not be done. A Dyahla of Sawal Bahal, who also serves as a priest for his own caste, said this is good because there will be competition. But the concern of most Dyahlas is that cleaning job has been transformed into a contract business, and public and private offices nowadays do not recruit sweepers as a permanent staff, and most Dyahlas claim this is the main reason for their not having any jobs. This has led to a high demand for permanent cleaning jobs. The Chyamkhalah woman from Sawal Bahal told me that she paid fifty thousand rupees in bribe a few years ago to get a job for her daughter at the *nagarpalika* (the Kathmandu metropolitan city) and adds that nowadays one would not get such job by even bribing hundred thousand rupees. Moreover, Ravi, a young Dyahla man of Kirtipur, the only graduate in Kirtipur, muses of getting a license and being a contractor of cleaning jobs in one of the booming business apartments in Kathmandu, saying that many Dyahlas are making, and have made, fortune this way. In his opinion, it may be degrading for an educated person like him to do the cleaning job himself, but hiring others to do the same is a good choice, which will create jobs for other Dyahlas and will also modernize the occupation, lessening the stigma associated with the cleaning job.

This gradual non-poor status has been utilized to argue against the Dalit identity. In their view, only beggars, who have nothing to eat and who are oppressed, are Dalits. Yet, their ambivalence revealed immediately when

they said that Dalits were also humans and there were rich non-Newars Dalits.

Interestingly, the entry of other castes into their traditional occupation has also been utilized to attack the Dalit identity. Anti-Dalits argue that *Khay-Barmu*<sup>17</sup> and other Newar castes should also be labelled as Dalits because they are now sweepers and latrine cleaners—if one identifies Dalit on the basis of occupation. Dharma, of Sawal Bahal, related to me that now many Dyahlas have stopped doing the cleaning work themselves but are contractors and employ people other than their caste to do the cleaning work, so they are not Dalits but rather these other people are. He, a sweeper by post in a government hospital, but like many Dyahla sweepers who does not do the cleaning work himself, told me of an incident whereby he confronted with a high-ranking staff after he was treated as an untouchable for quite some time: “You treat as equal that person [a non-Newar man] whom I order to clean the toilet and whom I send into the septic tank to clean it up, yet you treat me as an untouchable. Judging by appearance, you look like a Pode, not me.”

Yet in another incident, when I was interviewing Dyahlas in Kirtipur, a Dyahla whom I was not talking to interrupted, saying that those Dyahlas, who said they were not Dalits, should not do cleaning job. He, like many others, demanded that those professing Janajatis guarantee them other work if they want to convert Dyahlas to Janajatis.

*Jajmani System:* Dalit activists also point out to the vestiges of *jajmani* system as an evidence of existence of caste system and hence discrimination in Newar society (Ahuti 2010: 111). In Sawal Bahal, it is no longer practised, and in Kirtipur, until a few years ago it was practised. *Jajmani* system, based on economic and socio-cultural interdependence, encompasses, if not integrates, untouchables and other castes. My informants point out two main *jajmani* practices: *bhway wanegu* (attending the patron’s feast) and *wa syu wanegu* (collection of leftover paddy after harvest).<sup>18</sup>

Dyahlas used to be invited to feasts by their patrons regularly. This non-economic system of commodity exchange, if measured in terms of money, seems to be in favour of the Dyahlas. One elder from Kirtipur, Ashalal, told me that unconsumed food after a feast given to his family would last sometimes up to 15 days, and there would be several such feasts in a year by a patron, and there would be several patrons for a Dyahla family. In exchange, they needed to provide, according to him, only a few baskets, few duck eggs, and some fish to the patrons for one or two times a year, mainly for village *jatra* and *Swanti* festival.

Pro-Dalits reject this system stating that it is an unequal and oppressive exchange system. Dyahlas used to be provided meals at feasts separately—as Ravi, the graduate from Kirtipur, put it, “outside the *paal*” (partition or enclosure for feast)—as opposed to beggars. Eating leftover food, as described poignantly by Levy (1990: 385), is a different context, of poverty. Panbhai, a pro-Dalit leader from Kirtipur, said that they were only invited the day after the feast when the food was “cold and stale” and it is a form of discrimination: “Had we been treated equal, we would have been invited on the day of the feast, along with others.” Dyahlas used to collect *chipa* (leftover food) after feasts.

Another form of *jajmani* relationship is collection of leftover paddy and other grains in the fields after harvest. Ashalal, the elder from Kirtipur, reported that collecting leftover paddy for a fortnight would provide rice, in some years, for up to six months. Jayram, an elder from Sawal Bahal, recalled people going as far as Thankot, the westernmost part of the Valley, to collect paddy. Dyahlas also used to “beg” paddy (*wa pho wanegu*) from their *ista* (patrons) while harvesting and would be provided with half to one *pathi* (a measure of 4.5 litres, or about 4 kg of paddy). Farmers also employed Dyahlas for *kaki dayegu* (sifting the hay and spreading it for drying), and the fallen and leftover paddy Dyahlas would take home. One woman from Kirtipur, the wife of Ashalal, whom I have known for more than 20 years, used to come to collect paddy from the whole village of Nagaon, which has at least 150 households. With begging at several patrons, then, it is no wonder that they would have enough to live by for six months. But since 1990, as they had job opportunities at various public and private offices and thus were no longer poor, they abandoned it. Ashalal related to me one incident when the farmers rebuked them after finding Dyahla women wearing gold ornaments while coming to collect paddy.

Therefore, it appears that the *jajmani* system is, in some way, “profitable” for the Dyahla. Specifically, the paddy collecting activity, though obviously a sign of their poverty, can be seen as a “generosity” on the part of the patron, as Ashalal puts it. With such instances, it may not be overstatement to say that Dyahlas, at least partly, survived because of such a system.

*Origination Stories:* There is no evidence yet on the origin of Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah. Gellner cites they came from Pondu, in Bengal, hence the word “Pode” (1995b: 283, n.28). Scholars trace their origin at least to Lichhavi period (Ahuti in Dalit Sandesh 2011: 23; Joshi 2002). Some activists, both anti- and pro-Dalit, told me that they were Kirati courtiers,

who were defeated by Lichhavi and then outcasted. Dilbabu, from Sawal Bahal, referred Dyahlas as children of Harishchand (see Gellner 1995b: 286; Joshi 2002). These reveal a tendency to trace their identity to pre-Hindu tribes, which is a feature of Dalit activism (Gellner 1997c: 310); yet, simultaneously, they claim Kshatriya status, a protest for their lowness in caste hierarchy. Chyamkhalah, literally “eight lineages,” according to Gautam from Sawal Bahal, were former courtiers along with Dyahlas.

Toffin (2007: 16) sees the nonobservance of life cycle rituals of *ihī* and *bara* by girls and other rituals such as *mha puja* and *bhai tika* during the Tihar festival by peripheral Newar communities like Pahari, Swangumi, and Balamis as mark of their divergence or incomplete integration. I think this can be applied to Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah as well because they are also marginalized and until recently did not observe such rituals and festivals. According to this line of thought, Dyahlas can be considered as incompletely assimilated. He further argues that such cultural differences are the seeds for separate identity movements, for example by Paharis, who are now listed as a separate ethnic group.

Tracing the Dyahla origin to pre-Hindu tribe has been used to prove their subordination under the caste system. However, conversely, this identity can be used to prove that they are aborigines, not Dalits. As Manoj, a Khadgi leader, put it, “We Khadgis can also claim Kshatriya status if one goes by one’s origin. Original identity is no use. We [Dyahlas and Khadgis] have become Newars and should remain Newars, not Dalits.” This tribal origin of Dyahla is refuted by Gellner (1995b: 291) on grounds that in low castes in India and Parbatiya low castes in Nepal, and even Newar Khadgis, have been “agents of Hinduisation,” and also by contrasting the marriage pattern between untouchable Chuhra caste of India with Dyahlas.

### Identity Politics

This second part of the paper is concerned with the serious questions raised about Dalit and ethnic identity of Newars by this controversy as well as with insights into the formation of these identities in Nepal, and ultimately critiques of these concepts in the case of Nepal. The analysis of the controversy and the identity politics<sup>19</sup> behind it suggest the instrumental nature of these identities.

*Newar Dalit Identity:* Dalit identity has been contested by Newar activists on several grounds.<sup>20</sup> Some of these have been possible due to the complexity and ambiguity of the Dalit identity itself; some due to the differences

between the Parbatiya and Newar caste system in terms of history, religion, and society; some due to the socioeconomic changes in the lives of Newar low castes themselves; and lastly, politically, due to the rise of Newar ethnic movement after the 1990s.

Firstly, Dalit is not a singular identity but one of many identities such as that of a specific caste and/or an ethnic group. These dual or multiple identities at times conflict against one another. This is exactly the case with Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah. Anti-Dalits give more importance to the Newar identity and do not want to be identified as Dalits, whereas pro-Dalits emphasise Dalit identity and regard Newar identity as secondary and sometimes even insignificant or reject it. The interesting thing is that there is a tendency to avoid the *Khas* ethnicity by Parbatiya Dalits. This assertion of ethnic identities by various groups has become a concerning and threatening issue for Dalits. Nirmal, the pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga, expressed concern that, with Newars claiming Newar untouchables and pulling into Newar Janajati movement, with Madhesi political parties drawing Madhesi Dalits into their movement, and, recently with Brahmans and Chhetris trying to incorporate Parbatiya Dalits into their movement in a bid to be recognized as an indigenous/ethnic group, the Dalit movement is facing a serious challenge. He considered the Newar case as just “a beginning.”

Secondly, although the term “Dalit” has now been accepted in Nepal, as reflected by its inclusion in the Interim Constitution of 2007, and although Dalit activists assert that the term Dalit has no attached stigma but is a respected term established by Dalit movement (see Ahuti 2010: 3), the term not only symbolizes the history of exclusion but rather reinforces it (Cameron 2007: 18). The most vivid example of the hesitation is in 1997 by Mukti Samaj, affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal, Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), to retain the word “Dalit” from its name to the extent that it split. Anti-Dalits informants found the term to be stigmatizing, and I am told that Dyahlas in Kumbhesor and Chhetrapati would resort to violence if one calls them “Dalit.” Although many anti-Dalits did not say explicitly that the term Dalit was offensive and derogatory, their resistance to identity themselves as such implies that they consider it stigmatizing.

Thirdly, Dalit activists have not found an unambiguous definition of Dalit. The controversy of whether some groups are Dalits or Janajati is equally, if not more, prominent in some Madhesi groups such as Kushwadia and Lohars (see NDC 2010). In the Newar case, there is controversy on whether to include also the water-acceptable untouchables (all of whom are Newars) as Dalits. NDC many a time does not seem to be clear on the

number of Newar low castes—a sign of extreme irresponsibility and negligence—such as when it redundantly listed Kapali, Kusule (same as Kapali), Dyahla, Pode (same as Dyahla), Khadgi, Kasai (same as Khadgi), and Chyame (Chyamkhalah) in its Dalit list in draft bill of NDC of 2002. Moreover, the fluidity of the definition, and hence who are Dalits, seems also to be determined by the identity politics of groups wanting to be included or excluded in the Dalit list. Of note, NDC itself updates the Dalit list periodically. Although initially the NDC included Newar castes in its Dalit, it removed all of them due to protest of Newar ethnic and caste activists, but it later included Dyahla and Chyamkhalah submitting to protest of these two caste groups. As if to complicate matters, different government bodies have defined Dalits differently, as have different aid agencies and non-governmental organizations and Dalit scholars. This seems to have major implication for Newars. For instance, Ministry of Local Development in 1997 included certain castes, ethnic groups (including Newars), and classes as Dalits; Dahal et al (2002) made distinction between Hill, Terai, and “Newar Dalits” without defining Dalit; and National Dalit Commission in 2003 basically adopted the classification of Dahal et al (2002) without making distinction between Hill, Terai, and “Newar Dalits.” These all classifications included Newar impure castes as Dalits. An extreme example of the identity politics by Dalit activists on Newars, of “pulling” Newar low castes into Dalit list—although acknowledging himself that even the NDC has dropped them from its list—has been demonstrated by a Dalit scholar (Kisan 2005: 193) by retaining the Newar castes Kapali, Khadgi, Kusule (same as Kapali, so redundant), and Dhobi in his Dalit list, on the premise that “some of these communities again claimed to be Dalits and the practice of untouchability with these communities can still be observed in Newar society.”

Finally, although activists recognize the temporary nature of the Dalit identity (see Ahuti 2010: 152–153), they are reluctant to let others become non-Dalits. Then, a question can be raised: If a group or caste, even maybe of one particular community, feels that it has overcome the various religious, political, economic disabilities sustained in the past, can it assert a non-Dalit identity? The case of Newar Rajak (Dhobi) is important here. Newar Rajaks were treated as impure but touchable by the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, but Rajaks in Madhes are untouchables and are listed as Dalits. Then, the boundary between Dalit and non-Dalit, here, has been mediated by the region, rather than by caste.

While trying to apply the Dalit concept to low-caste Newars, the social, economic, religious, and cultural difference between low-caste Newars and

Parbatiya untouchables, and the claim of superiority by each over other, should be considered. For example, ILO (2005: 19) reports that even the respondents belonging to the Badi community—the group with the lowest caste status among Hill Dalits—would not accept water from persons from castes lower than their own, namely, Dyahla and Chyamkhalah, which were prescribed caste status lower than that of the Badis by the *Muluki Ain* of 1854. However, Levy (1990: 104) notes that no Newar low castes eat carrion or remove dead cows, as the Sarkis do, and they consider themselves superior to the Sarki for that reason. My Dyahla informants also claimed that some people of Parbatiya low castes such as Sarki, Kami, and Damai accept death pollution of Dyahlas and are thus inferior. One Dyahla woman from Sawal Bahal, Nanju, claimed that Dyahlas nowadays usually have to find such people and bring them in taxis to give the death offerings, and they also provide relatively new furniture, and even ornaments, along with money to these people for accepting the death offerings.

*Newar Janajati Identity:* The Newar ethnic identity is a controversial one, as are many other Newar identities. This has now transformed into a controversy not limited between Brahman-Chhetris and Newars but between high-caste Newars and low-caste Newars, and more recently, between federalists and anti-federalists in contemporary politics of Nepal with the movement for demand, and granting by the government in May 2012, of *Adivasi/Janajati* status by Brahman-Chhetri-Dalit groups.

Gellner (1991; see also 1986), while discussing the Hindu/tribal dichotomy, cites the uneasiness over Newar tribal identity by, among others, Hofer (1979: 43-4) and Sharma (1978: 1, 6). Onta (2006: 303-354) reviews the disqualification and re-qualification of Newars to be identified as ethnic groups on two grounds: caste system and power, citing Vishwakarma (2003), Malla (2000), and others. He notes that the presence of caste system along with low caste that fits into Dalit disqualifies Newars as Janajatis on the basis of proposed Santa B. Gurung-led taskforce as there was a criterion of not being part of the Hindu caste system. But later, National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NEDIN) in 2003 omitted the caste system provision in its definition. Hangen (2007: 21) suggests this is “perhaps because it was too oppositional for the government.” But Brahmans, Chhetris, and Dalits, and “Newar Dalits” alike, see this as a requirement by NEFIN and NFDIN for inclusion of Newars. Pro-Dalits and non-Newar Dalit leaders charge that Newar intellectuals and leaders were successful in



reinstating the ethnic status by denying the existence of the Dalits and caste system in Newar society (see also Dalit Sandesh 2011).

To counter such claims, Newar ethnic leaders claim that the caste system was imposed on Newars because originally there was no hierarchy and even Sthiti Malla imposed the caste system as division of labour but not on the purity-pollution basis. But such claim is obviously unfounded. Interestingly, obviously to reaffirm their ethnic status, different caste and national organisations of Newars proclaimed on the *Newa Day* in 2008 that all Newar castes are equal and there is no caste discrimination and no provision or definition of Dalits in Newar society.

The presence of low castes and untouchability in Newar caste system have been highlighted by Hill Dalits and pro-Dalits alike to challenge the Newar ethnic identity and assert their own *Adivasi/Janajati* identity. This claim has two parts. One the one hand, pro-Dalits and non-Newar Dalits claim that Newars are not Janajatis due to their caste system with untouchability, meaning Newars as a whole are not Janajati. On the other hand, “Newar Dalits” claim that they themselves are the real *Adivasis* and the higher castes are not.

The relatively good economic condition of Newars has also been used as an evidence for non-Janajati status of Newars. Scholars and Nepalese politicians alike often mention the high human development index and representation in status apparatus of Newars to prohibit Newars from state benefits. I think this is a truncated and partial view of economic situation of Newars. It may apply to few Newar elites, but the vast majority of Newars, especially the most numerous Jyapus caste and ones below them, have been excluded by the state and dominated by high-caste Newars as well as by Brahmins and Chhetris. Moreover, the benefits and privileges enjoyed by many urban Newars is not due to their grabbing of power but is a “by-product” of the development carried out by the ruling elites since the establishment of the Kathmandu Valley as capital by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Most recently, with demands by Bahuns-Chhetris to be identified as indigenous nationality, and with the government “granting” the indigenous nationality status for them in May 2012, prior efforts by Bahun-Chhetris to de-list Newars from Janajati have become suspect. Similarly, with some Dalits demanding their own territorial province in direct competition with other ethnic and regional groups, this rejection of Newar ethnic identity by non-Newars, sometimes used to oppose their demand for Newar province, has suddenly lost ground.

*Number Game:* One direct consequence of Janajati status of Newars is that there is no official population data of Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah. Pro-Dalits and non-Newar Dalits claim, validly, this as one of the major reasons for the low population count of Dalits (WB/DFID 2005: Ch. 8-5). They demand that CBS provide such data and add it to that of Dalits. Panbhai, the pro-Dalit leader, blamed Newar activists for obstructing such a move. Although Newar activists may have interests not to disclose them, obtaining such data should not be a problem.

A more serious blame game is that each side blames the other for trying to increase their group's population. Newars blame Dalits for claiming Dyahla and Chyamkhalah as Dalits to increase Dalit population, whereas Dalits blame Newars for trying to increase Newar population by calling the whole Newars as Janajatis. When Nirmal, the Dalit leader from Tilganga, raised this issue and I approached him that Dyahla and Chyamkhalah combined even do not reach 3 percent of Newar population,<sup>21</sup> a figure which he himself (and many pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits) did not deny, he had to concede that such an accusation is unjustified.

Also, there is a threat sometimes articulated by some pro-Dalits (see Dalit Sandesh 2011) that they would split and secede if they do not get the Dalit status. Given the above figures, such threat to secession is neither plausible nor effective in terms of number, but it will obviously have serious symbolic and cultural consequences.

*Benefits versus Dignity:* The whole politics of identity between pro-Dalits and anti-Dalits in the case of Newars, and to some extent in the case of all Dalits, boils down to one thing: benefits versus dignity. All of my anti-Dalit respondents link Janajati identity to dignity and consider pro-Dalits as seeking benefit more than dignity. However, they are ambivalent about the perceived stigma of Dalit identity. Nanju, the woman from Sawal Bahal, said that there was nothing wrong with being Dalit as "Dalits are also people," but she herself would not accept such identity. In other words, she despises calling herself Dalit but does not despise those who are Dalits. Although anti-Dalits link Dalit identity to poverty, shabbiness, uncleanness, homelessness, etc., they also concede that there are many rich Dalits and Parbatiya Dalits are becoming richer. All anti-Dalits maintain that Dalits are a category of *khas* people (many have no idea that there are Madhesi or Terai Dalits) and that Newars cannot not be Dalits.

On the other hand, pro-Dalits accept their seeking of benefits as legitimate. They demand not only government benefits in the form of quotas

for education and employment but also privileged rights as a compensation for their historical oppression. They regard Dalit as a respected term and a respected identity. An elder man from Kirtipur claimed that if a prime minister wanted all the due and undue benefits, then there was nothing wrong for a Dalit to claim benefits.

Pro-Dalits claim that Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah will get much more rights, benefits, and privileges by being Dalit rather than by being Janajati. Moreover, pro-Dalits deeply suspect that if they were removed from the Dalit list, other Newars would grab all the privileges provided for Newars as Janajati and they would get none.<sup>22</sup> Pro-Dalits view that they would need to compete both with other educated and more powerful Newars as well as other numerous Janajatis for privileges, whereas they need to compete only with less numerous Dalits. This view, although justified with regard to the population of Dalits and Janajatis, is not tenable considering other differences between Newar Dalits and other Dalits. For instance, Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah are much more behind in education and politics than other Dalits to compete with other Dalits.

Interestingly, almost all my pro-Dalit respondents were found to be those who had gained some sort of benefit by asserting the Dalit identity, be that in terms of employment for themselves or their children, scholarship for their children in school or college, or a position in a political party. I found every pro-Dalit either a Dalit leader or activist. However, I found one exception. Pulal, a pro-Dalit—who only this year transferred her two daughters, one studying in grade four and another in grade eight, from a private school to a government one due to an incident of discrimination in the private school she was studying at—is a strong advocate of Dalit status, yet he claims that he has not received any help whatsoever from fellow Dalits.

I was told by my respondents in Sawal Bahal that there are Dyahlas who denounce the Dalit identity in public yet are enjoying such benefits. However, I could not come across such a person. If one considers seeking government benefit as their right, whatever their status may be, such cases reflect neither hypocrisy nor opportunism, as many of my pro-Dalits would like to call it. Hiding or rejecting one's Dalit identity does not necessarily mean renouncing benefits one is entitled to, and my anti-Dalit respondents are actively seeking such benefits. They told me that they chose non-Dalit status because they could not get any benefit as Dalits. Gyan, the activist from Kirtipur, told me that he advised people to accept any opportunity as it was their right to demand so. Such ambiguities do not seem to be a conscious

one but, as Parish (1997) concludes, is a feature of one's low position in the caste system.

Anti-Dalits point to the inadequacy, if not irrelevance, of such benefits as providing five hundred rupees per year to a Dalit student. Pro-Dalits say that benefits such as these come in increments, and to get such benefits they should assert the Dalit identity and struggle for their rights. However, I found one instance of denouncing such a benefit on self-pride. Anjana, from Sawal Bahal, reported a recent incident where she and her sister denounced the monthly allowance of five hundred rupees—which they were entitled to by the department of cottage industry for a training, after the trainer learnt that they were of Dalit caste—stating that they were not Dalits and would not accept such benefits but that the office rather give it to needy people. Although such incidents and gestures may not be common, they indicate a strong assertion of non-Dalit status as opposed to—as one anti-Dalit respondent called it—“greediness” of Parbatiya Dalits.

A most prolific anti-Dalit leader from Bhaktapur, Maila Babu, conceded that anti-Dalits were not opposed to benefits; rather they demanded it, but not in the name of Dalits but as a caste and class of Janajati Newar who had been historically discriminated by the state. However, Dilbabu, the former pro-Dalit activist from Sawal Bahal, suggested categorizing Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah as a special group that was neither Janajati nor Dalit and that the state should provide them with special rights. The idea of such new identity does not seem relevant or feasible in the present context of group identity politics of Nepal.

*Right to Self-determination:* One way to resolve this debate may be through right to self-determination by way of plebiscite. An unpublished survey conducted by Lumanti (2010) showed that only 5.6 percent of 607 Dyahlas of 10 *toles* of the Valley considered themselves to be Dalits, although the survey is questionable on its methodology. Similarly, Jyapu et al. (2009) in their study of 10 *toles* of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur among 658 respondents also give similar results, with 95 percent asserting non-Dalit identity. I found most of the Dyahlas in Kirtipur ambiguous, but there are many pro-Dalit activists and leaders, and few anti-Dalits confide their strong anti-Dalit views. However, in Sawal Bahal, I could not find any pro-Dalit, although commoners, as opposed to activists and leaders, were either anti-Dalits or ambiguous.

Anti-Dalits prefer and demand such plebiscite, but pro-Dalits oppose it, probably due to their obvious minority in such a move. On the face of it, it

seems that a small minority is being powerful here and holding back a big majority. However, one needs to remember that there is a reasonable possibility that many anti-Dalits may change sides and turn the table if they are led to believe that they would get special privileges through a new constitution. This is exactly what the pro-Dalits are professing and waiting for. The pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga, Nirmal, claimed that the opposition to Dalit identity is due to “lack of political consciousness” on the part of Dyahlas. However, such an argument is not tenable as I have met anti-Dalit activists and leaders—some of them quite young—with great political insights.

### **Conclusion**

Before seeking a way out of this controversy, one needs to identify on what grounds we are searching or recommending a solution. Are these different identities mutually exclusive or not? Who has the ultimate authority to grant the identity? How do we recognize the view of minority?

Of the multiple identities in Nepal, we need to differentiate between identities that are mutually exclusive and that are mutually inclusive. Whereas the identities of Brahman/Chhetris and Janajatis are mutually exclusive of each other, those of Dalits and regional identities such as Parbatiya and Madhesi are not. For example, Dalits are categorized as Hill Dalits<sup>23</sup> or Madhesi Dalits.” Similarly, Madhesi can be Brahmans, Dalits, Muslims, etc. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, Dalit identity need not contradict with either regional or ethnic identity as these identities are, as instrumentalists and postmodernists argue and as we saw, constructs that are fluid with unstable boundaries. Moreover, one need not require to, and should not be compelled to, choose a single identity, and identities should not be put in a hierarchical order: one can be both a Janajati and a Dalit simultaneously.

If one considers that identity is legitimized by the state, then the state can take matters into hands and decide one way or another. But this does not seem possible due to the current period of transition in Nepal and also due to implications for party politics, especially in the context of intense identity politics as is happening in Nepal, where Janajatis and Dalits are two of the most important movements. Although the pro-Dalit leader from Tilganga said that they would accept whatever the state decides, it may not be so. Siding by Dalits with pro-Dalits and Newars with anti-Dalits in such a case will lead to conflagration of this conflict between Newars and Dalits. Then, there seems, in the near future, to be no change in the status quo.

Alternatively, and this is what I believe and suggest, the state may remove these two castes from Dalit list, thus respecting the voice of the majority. Moreover, the state can certify that one is Dalit even if one is a Janajati or Madhesi. It is only the current group identity politics, in a prelude to promulgation of a new constitution, that is sharply demarcating the ethnic and Dalit boundaries.

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### **Notes**

1. The Ministry list included Kasai (honorifically, Khadgi), Kusule (honorifically, Kapali), Kuche (not a separate caste but includes both Dyahla and Chyamkhalah, so ambiguous), Chyame (or Chyamkhalah), and Poda (honorifically, Dyahla) as Dalits.
2. In this paper, I have used “pro-Dalits” to refer to Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah who identify themselves as Dalits and “anti-Dalits” to those Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah who oppose being called Dalits and prefer to be Janajatis.
3. Fieldwork for this study was carried out from December to March 2012. Information was collected mainly by extensive interviews with 35 Dyahlas in Kirtipur and Sawal Bahal of Kathmandu and one Chyamkhalah family in Sawal Bahal. Interviews with local and national Newar Dalit activists and Newar ethnic activists were also done to verify and differentiate the views propagated by leaders/activists and their degree of acceptance/rejection by individual community members. Respondents were identified mainly on referral basis. As Dyahlas are numerous in these and other areas compared to Chyamkhalah, and as Chyamkhalahs do not have formal caste organization and present their views through Dyahla organizations, it is hoped that for the purpose of this study Dyahlas represent both castes.

4. Terms such as “low castes” and “untouchables” have been used in this study to indicate the past status of Dalits, especially as classified in the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, and in no way indicate their present status, since the Nepalese state does not allow discrimination of its citizens in terms of caste or other identity.
5. Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) does not provide disaggregated data for separate Newar castes as Newars are regarded as a single ethnic group. Dyahla activists agree that they are less than 3 percent of the total Newar population. Rosser (1966) estimated Dyahlas at 1.3 percent of the total Newar population, Chyamkhalah at 0.7 percent, and Halahulu at 0.1 percent. Gaborieau (1978), quoted in Whelpton (2005), estimates impure castes (Khadgis, Dyahlas and other lower castes as 0.4 percent of total population of Nepal, or 2.24 percent of total Newar population).
6. For discussion of traditional occupations of Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah, see Chattopadhyay (1923), Levy (1990), and Gellner (1995).
7. Slusser (1982: 217), however, incorrectly, includes also Chyamkhalah as “guardian-servants.”
8. For the purpose of this study, I have refrained from using the term “Newar Dalit,” and when used, it has been put inside quotes.
9. By “Sweeper caste” she means, I suppose, both Dyahla and Chyamkhalah castes.
10. For discussion of this role, see Gellner 1994; Toffin 2007; Levy 1990). For mention of its economic contribution, see Levy (1990: 462).
11. In Dakshinkali temple, there are three priests, one from each of Dyahla, Karmacharya, and Maharjan castes.
12. The king does not visit these places as he represents these gods himself.
13. This ancestral temple right of Dyahla community in the Kathmandu Valley had been confirmed by the king in the year 1812 (Chaitra 1869 V.S.), Regmi Research Collection, vol. 39, doc. 858, p. 602.
14. See Levy (1990) for symbolic exclusionary inclusion of Newar low castes in rituals.
15. Literally, Newar Day, when thousands of Newars gathered in Kathmandu to show their ethnic solidarity and demand Newar province in the new constitution to be promulgated.
16. Dyahlas who live outside the Valley, such as Chitlang, Tistung, and Palung, have sizeable land of their own, but most of them are now settled in the Kathmandu Valley. Only those inside the Valley do not possess any ancestral land.
17. Newars use the term *Khay-Barmu*, literally Khas and Brahmans, to refer especially to Brahmans or Chhetris, but sometimes to all other people who speak the Nepali language. They use the term *Sayn* to refer to ethnic groups resembling Tibetans such as Tamangs and use *Marsya* (*Marasiya*) for Madhesis.
18. Such collection includes also other grains like wheat, and also potatoes in areas where they are grown, such as in the town of Sankhu, north of Bhaktapur. They also collected grains shed by hail or heavy precipitation.

19. "Identity politics," for the purpose of this study, refers to political activity or movement demanding recognition of one's group (such as based on caste, ethnicity, gender, religion) as different and differential treatment thereof.
20. For a discussion on critique of Dalit identity by Dalit themselves, see Cameron (2007).
21. See footnote 5 for population of these two castes.
22. *Newa Dey Daboo* has classified Dyahlas and Chyamkhalah as endangered Newar castes and has a policy of providing first priority to them on any entitlement received by the institution.
23. Of note, NDC has presently put the two Newar castes in the "Hill Dalit" category rather than "Newar Dalit" category due to the controversy and due to opposition from Newars.

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# UNEXPLORED GENDER RELATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AMONG A DALIT COMMUNITY IN DHAPAKHEL VDC OF LALITPUR DISTRICT

Sanju Nepali

## Abstract

*This research<sup>1</sup> has attempted to contribute in the field of gender relation in access to education among a Dalit community of Lalitpur district. Its special focus has been to examine the types of gender relation existing in response to providing education in the study site. Gender relation refers to the relations of power between women and men which is revealed through a range of practices, ideas and representations including division of labor, roles and resources between males and women. The major objective of this research is to understand the types of gender relations that exist between boys/males and girls/females in Dalit community and how they have affected the girls' education.*

*The study was conducted in the Dhapakhel VDC of Lalitpur district in a Dalit community. The qualitative research methods were employed- household surveys, focus group discussion and open interviews were used for the data collection.*

*The findings of the study reveals that though gender relations are changing along positive lines, particularly in relation to schooling there were several instances of gender discrimination in providing education to girls. Knowingly and unknowingly household members are discriminating between their sons and daughters. These types of discriminatory behaviors, attitudes and practices of parents are the reflections of socially and culturally detained patriarchal norms. Although such norms are not officially declared, their roots have surrounded the society as customs and become a matter of everyday act. Discrimination is expressed by parents in the form of biased behavior, assignment of household chores only to daughters, supporting sons by giving more emphasis to their studies and neglecting studies of their daughters at the same time. Parents also have different expectations from their sons and daughters. Such practices result in constraints to access and continued participation of girls in education. So, girls have access to public schools. But still they have to fulfill the responsibility at home, which has hampered their study. Consequently repetition and dropout rate among girls*

*seems high. Though parents give more priority to boys' education, the educational attainment of boys was also found not good. This paper is based on a research conducted in Dhapakhel VDC of Lalitpur district during 2010 to 2011.*

### **Context and Background:**

Education is the fundamental basis for development and it plays an important role to promote entire development system of any nation. Realizing its importance Nepal has been determined to fulfill the commitment made by the world summit on 'Education for All' (EFA) 2004-2015, which stated that Education is the fundamental right of all people. According to UNESCO and UNICEF Report (2007), there are three interrelated rights related to human development: 'The right of access to education'- Education must be available, accessible and inclusive of all children; 'The right to quality education'- Education needs to be child-centered, relevant and embrace a broad curriculum and be appropriately resourced and monitored; and 'The right to respect within the learning environment'- Education must be provided in a way that is consistent with human rights, equal respect for culture, religion and language and free from all forms of violence.

Though policy states that education is a fundamental right of people but in practice there is no proper accessibility, availability and freedom for education. This is because in Nepal, women/girls face multiple discriminations in every sphere of life, among which gender discrimination in access to education is the major one. There is still educational inequality in the field of gender, region, and caste despite various improvements in education sector (UNDP, 2009). For instance, the overall literacy rate of Brahmin/Chhettri is 68.6 percent in female and 92.8 percent in male whereas the overall literacy rate of *Dalit* is 34.8 in female and 59.9 in male (NPHS, 2006). Similarly, the share of *Dalit* enrolment is 21.7% at primary level, 14.6% at lower secondary, 10.5% at secondary and 6.8% at higher secondary level (DoE, 2068). This shows that *Dalits* are far below in educational access at the national level. Though educational inequalities exist based on various reasons, such as gender, caste, economic status the study specially focused on gender relation in access to education.

Gender discrimination is a practice of differential treatment between girls/women and boys/men on the basis of sex. Different policies and strategies have been introduced concerning gender and education. For instance article 20 (1) of Interim Constitution of Nepal (ICN, 2007) guarantees that no one shall be discriminated in any form merely for being a

woman. But gender discrimination is still in practice especially in providing education. Consequently it has hampered women and girls' education. The educational status of women and girls is not satisfactory. This has been portrayed in low female literacy rate of 34.5 percent whereas male literacy rate is 62.2 percent among age group 15 and over (DoE, 2010).

This situation (educational inequalities) is found more in *Dalit* community in the context of Nepal. For instance, *Dalit male's* literacy rate is 59.9 percent and female's is 34.8 percent whereas secondary and higher education is 23.2 percent in male and 11.8 percent in female (UNDP, 2009). This asserts that *Dalits* have been marginalized in economic, social, cultural, educational and other spheres by the state system based on the feudal Hindu caste system (UNDP, 2008).

It is manifested in Nepal because of the existing patriarchal society and the social culture that shape gender-based social construction (Acharya, 2004). The study tries to answer three major research questions related to gender and education: 1) what gender relation exists in *Dalit* community in terms of access to education? 2) what are the reasons behind the inequitable gender relation if such exists? and 3) How has gender related discriminations affect girls' education?

### **Theoretical Basis for Analysis**

I have used gender analysis framework to analyze my field information. Gender analysis is the systematic examination of the roles, relationships, and processes between women and men in all societies, focusing on imbalance in power, wealth and workload (Bhattarai 2002). In this regard, I have analyzed field data by linking Social Relation Framework (SRF) and Gender Role Framework (GRF). The reason is that the GRF focuses on systematic examination of the roles, relationship and processes between women and men in all societies focusing on imbalances in power, wealth and workload. The main objective of this framework is to demonstrate that there is an economic rationale for investing in women as well as men.

Similarly, SRF focuses on social relation/power relation and mutual and reciprocal relation. The Social Relations Framework was developed by Naila Kabeer during the early 1990s as a method of analyzing existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power. In accordance with aforesaid theoretical concept, I found SRF to be more relevant for my study. SRF is an analysis to show how gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced within structural and institutional

factors, and then to design policies that can enable women to work to change those factors that constrain them.

According to Leach (2003), SRF is a powerful means of examining and explaining 'gender relations' as constructed and maintained in institutions. It focuses on the relationships between the people and their relationship to resources and activities. So, examining a particular institution with this framework will help in exploring how gender inequality is formed and reproduced in particular institution (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhaya, 2000).

As mentioned in Leach (2003), "Kabeer uses the term 'social relations' to describe the structural relationships that create and reproduce systematic differences in the positioning of groups of people" (p.87). According to her, such relationships determine our identities, roles and responsibilities.

Likewise, Silver (2007) and De haan (2007) focus on institutional and relational basis of exclusion and inclusion. According to them, Social exclusion/inclusion connotes multidimensional aspects of society. Among them Caste and Gender are key determinants of social exclusion/inclusion. It operates as an institution (Bennett, 2006). Based on gender inequality Girls/women are oppressed and excluded in the family as well as the society

### **Empirical Study**

I reviewed the previous study reports which were related to my area of study. Different scholars have undertaken study regarding gender and education. Still, very little research has been carried out in Nepal that focuses on gender relations among *Dalit* communities. I discuss below some of the researches specific to gender and girls carried out in context of education.

Firstly, I review the research of Renu Thapa (2007) " Changing gender relations in schooling and at local development: Cases of two localities in Kathmandu Valley (M. Phil dissertation)". This is a qualitative study and conducted in one urban and one rural area of Kathmandu valley. She has presented field data in a narrative form. The thesis concentrates on how gender relation exists in schooling and at local development. It provides several instances of gender discrimination in providing education to girls such as family's discrimination and society's discriminatory patterns of behavior. Girls have to face constraints in regard to access and continued participation in education. The other important finding of the study is there are instances of discrimination against boys in the school. For example teachers paid less attention to boys as they were less inclined to study; Girls, who were more intelligent and took part in classroom interaction, were given more attention by the teachers There are two specific reasons for this: girls'



performance in school is much better than that of boys and girls outnumber boys in the school. This leads to the important conclusion that girls do better when they do not have to face discriminations - which presents a strong case in favor of the single-sex school.

Samarna Bajracharya's (2009) thesis of M. Phil titled "Discrimination against girls in school and home: Their perceptions and responses". The study explores the reasons behind discrimination against girls and the perceptions and responses of girls towards discrimination they face. This study is based on the qualitative premise of subjectivism and data were collected from two schools. She used Social Relations Approach for understanding inequality at Home and School.

The study focuses at the micro level by analyzing everyday classroom and home activities from the perspective of an actor itself. She has analyzed classroom process and interaction that takes place between teachers and students (girls and boys), and between students themselves. And she also analyzed gender pattern of behavior in society and at home. The study found that relationships within the classroom were powerful in generating gender stereotyped identities. Moreover, differential allocation of household chores makes girls see discrimination as natural, practical and traditional. So the study shows how gender based discrimination exists in the schools and society and how girls are responding to such discriminatory patterns of behavior.

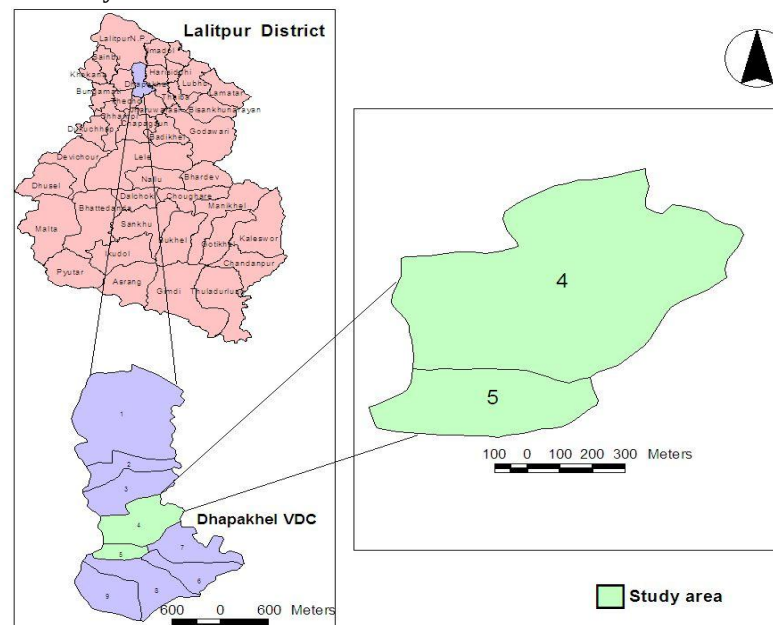
Another Master's Thesis by Lilith Scharer (2005) titled "Factors influencing the gender disparity in primary school participation: A case study in Rupandehi District, Nepal." examined the patterns and causes of gender inequality in primary school participation in Lumbini, Rupandehi District, Nepal. The study sample focused on Hindu and Muslim households, and both government schools and *madrassas* (Islamic schools). The livelihood strategies of households influence parents' perceptions of both direct and opportunity costs associated with children's schooling. The study shows why girls' education is particularly vulnerable in the poor rural study communities. It also reveals that gendered labor division also places a heavy burden on girls in terms of work. The patrilocal marriage system does not lead parents to regard investment in girls' education as beneficial, since girls marry out of their natal family where boys, as future household income earners, are given preference. Finally, the study finds out that the practice of early marriage is a key reason for girls being disadvantaged in educational opportunities. Poverty, the dowry system, and girls' exclusion from the

labour market further constrain parents from providing their daughters with the same schooling opportunities as sons.

### Methodology

*Study Site and its Selection:* Ward No. 4 and 5 of Dhapakhel VDC of Lalitpur district was selected for the study.

**Figure 1: Study Location**



I selected this site because the information based on VDC profile showed that there were higher number of Dalit households with educational inequality based on gender and caste i.e. higher literacy rate of men than that of women; high educational attainment among males in comparison to females. There was also low level of educational attainment of the guardian. I intended to know why these things happened. And the research site is easily accessible considering time and distance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

**Sampling and Sample Size:** Sampling is the process of inferring something about a large group of elements by studying only a part of it (Pathak, 2008). Non-probability and probability sample designs were applied in the research process. Under the non-probability, purposive sampling was employed to select *Dalit* population of one VDC of Lalitpur district. Only

two settlements from a VDC were studied. In reference to probability sampling, stratified random sampling was also employed to make strata based on aforesaid social categories. And, Simple random sampling method was also deployed for respondent (households) selection aiming to reducing biases and error to make it representative.

*Data Collection:* The primary and secondary data collection processes were used for the study. The data collection process depended on the nature of research. My study was more qualitative in nature, so I collected more qualitative data for this study.

*The Primary Source:* For the primary source of data collection, I used interview schedule, case study, focus group discussion checklist and household survey form as research tools to collect information from research participants.

*Household Survey:* The household survey of theselected communities was carried out to get the overall scenario on educational and socio-economic aspects of the studied site such as population, caste ethnicity, family structure, age group, household income, occupations, and education status. The composition of the households influences its capacity to pursue different livelihood strategies. The number, age and sex of the household members are crucial factors relating to children's and particularly girls' educational opportunities (Shahbaz, Vinod, Geiser, Sadaf, Schärer, Müller-Böker, 2010). Household surveys were carried out by administering structured and semi-structured questionnaires. Sixty-two households were covered in the survey to illustrate the overall educational and socio-economic status of studied field.

*Open Interview:* Open interviews were carried out with those girls and boys who dropped out of school and other school children from different levels (primary, secondary, intermediate and higher level) and with parents also. By using the information collected from the open interview, I developed some case studies of different participants to present in-depth scenario of his/her life related to education. Fourteen girls and boys and twelve parents were included in the interview.

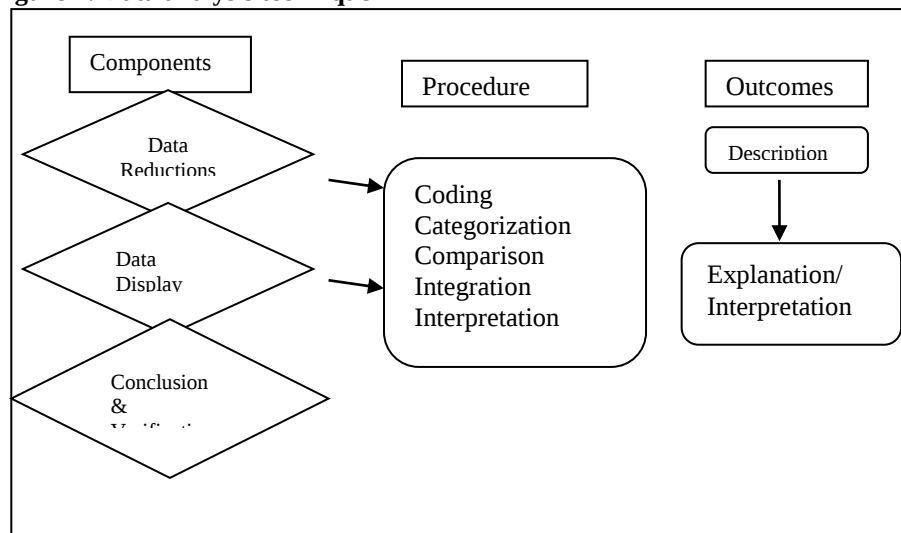
*Focus Group Discussion (FGD):* Focus group discussions were conducted separately with girls and boys children to study daily work schedule of boys

and girls in household. A total of seven FGDs was conducted with different groups of girls and boys to understand gender specific issues related to objectives especially enrollment, drop out etc. In group from 4 to 6 members (boys and girls) were separately discussed in two settlements (4 and 5 wards) of Dhapakhel VDC.

*Secondary Source:* The secondary data were obtained from review of statistical reports, annual reports, district and village development profiles and plan documents, journal articles, reference books, government policy documents and other published materials and official reports of different organizations.

*Data Analysis Techniques:* Data processing like editing, coding and others were done in course of data analysis. Data analysis was done through software packages SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Science) for quantitative information collected through household survey. The quantitative information (data) were interpreted and presented through frequency distribution and cross tabulation. Similarly, for qualitative analysis I assessed gender relation by following the gender analysis (SRF and GRF) and equity theory

**Figure 2: Data analysis technique**



(Adopted from: Brennan, 2005)

In this process, data reduction, data display and conclusion and verification are key components of data analysis. Thus, I coded, categorized, compared and interpreted cases as per the nature of study objectives. After reducing large masses of data, I described refined cases as per the research theme and then used narrative information while explaining and interpreting data.

### Result and Discussion

*Socio-economic Status:* In this section I analyze and interpret the data collected through household survey form in study site. I surveyed a total of 62 households of which 34 (55%) in ward no. 5 and 28 (45%) in ward no. 4. In both the settlements there was higher concentration of Dalit community. The information collected from the survey helped me to find the overall general scenario on educational and socio-economic status of study site. Specifically to generate information on economic condition of studied field I have used well being ranking of household which is described below in details.

*Well Being Ranking of Study Household:* This section is based on the data collected from the well being ranking in the research site. Well-being is economic rankings of households. The rankings are relative compressions of wealth or an agreed concept of well-being and do not require discussion of absolute income and other assets (Mikkelsen, 2005, p.105). Well-being ranking helps to find economic status of household. Economic aspect is directly or indirectly related to education. So I did well-being ranking in my research site. With the help of active participation of respondents, I divided household into three categories e.g. economically well off (A), Medium (B) and low (C). The table below displays the categories and characteristics of the surveyed households.

**Table 1: Categories of Studied Households**

| Categories        | No. of Households | Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High/Well off (A) | 10 (16%)          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Size of land holding- more than one ropani,<sup>2</sup> which is enough for the family containing four-five members for the whole year.</li> <li>- Member involved in own business</li> <li>- Job holding – especially government service</li> </ul> |

|            |             |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            |             | - Livelihood assets e.g. Car, Van etc.                                                                                                                                           |
| Medium (B) | 32<br>(52%) | - Land that can provide food only for 4-5 months i.e. more than half ropani<br>- Members involved in own business<br>- Livelihood assets e.g. Motorbike,                         |
| Low (C)    | 20<br>(32%) | - Unproductive and small land size 4 Ana<br>- Large family size<br>- No enough food to sustain the family<br>- Member involved in others labor as daily or monthly wage earners. |
| Total      | 62 (100%)   |                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Note: the norm was set by the respondents of the studied locality

Out of total households (62), there were 10 (16%) households belonging to 'A' category; 32 (52%) households belonging to 'B' category and 20 (32%) households that belonging to 'C' category. These groups of the people belonged to Sarki and Damai community. Majority of populations in study site were involved in their traditional caste based occupation (Sarki- leather work and Damai- tailoring). In addition to this, labor work, official work, agricultural works were also the supplementary sources of livelihood for the people of all well-being categories. The above data show the number of household belongs to middle and low economic status. Economic status determines economic strategy (leading to socio-economic strategy) and affordable capacity to spend for educating their children. It is helpful to analyze the relationship between economic category and educational attainment.

### ***Educational Status***

An important factor determining the quality of life is 'Access to Education' (Save the Children, 2007). The indicators of access to education, which I have used in my research, were enrollment, dropout, and educational attainment. Education is regarded internationally as birthright of every child. But in practice, there is no accessibility, availability and freedom for education. Overall Dalit literacy rate is 59.9% in male and 34.8% in female whereas secondary and higher education is 23.2% in male and 11.8% in female (UNDP, 2009). This reveals that Nepali Dalits have been marginalized in political, economic, social, cultural, educational and other

spheres of national life by the state system based on the feudal Hindu caste system (UNDP, 2008). With this frame in mind I assessed the educational status of Dalits from different literatures and found that it was very low compared to other communities in Nepal. In my study sites I found the similar situations as the literatures had shown. There were low number of educational attainment and low literacy status of people in study site. While comparing educational status from gender perspective the female illiterate number was high in comparison to male with continuous dropout rate and lack of motivation to reach out for education. This section discusses the overall education status of the study site

Generally, enrollment is the number of admitted students in a particular level (primary, secondary, higher education etc.) in a year. Enrollment also indicates how aware the community is about the need to attend school (Save the Children, 2007). In the current year the enrolment (of girls and boys) was encouraging in study site with almost all girls and boys (age group 5 to 19) being in school.

Likewise dropout, generally, means a person who leaves school or college, before completing a course or a particular class. School dropout is one of the key issues of education of Nepal. The main reason for dropout is that girls are required to be involved in heavier domestic work by the time they reach the age of secondary education (Tuladhar, 2007).

Similarly, the research by Poudel (2007) also reveals that there is low rate of school enrolment and high rate of dropout and large number of unschooled children from the Dalit community. It can be interpreted that Dalit communities have been educationally excluded on the ground of caste. This has been traditionally practiced in the society. With education being accessible, it can open up equal opportunities by maximizing each individual's capacity and strength. However, it has yet to reach the doors of the disadvantaged groups who do not get chance to expand their knowledge, skills, and strength (Pande, 2006). Apart from it, educating Dalit and women also create equality in the society, which is required for the so-called new Nepal.

The information based on interview with dropout girls and boys and their parents found that they dropped out from school because of poor economic status, involvement in household work (especially for girl), lack of motivation to study, lack of strong encouragement from parents and so on. The information was collected during the interview and summarized all information in a given table 2. The table below displays the reasons for boys and the girls for putting halt to their educational journey.

**Table 2: Reasons for Dropout for girls and boys**

| Level                                      | Reasons for Girls                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Reasons for Boys                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary,<br>Lower Sec.<br>and<br>Secondary | Lack of concentration while studying<br>Work load in household and less time for study<br>Lack of proper support from parents<br>Poor economic condition<br>Happy to do other work rather than study<br>Lack of motivation towards study | Because of the company (peer Pressure)<br>Lack of concentration on studies<br>Following father's occupation to earn money (only from Dalit community)<br>Poor economic condition |

Source: Field study 2011

The Nepalese girls/women face multiple discriminations in acquiring education. There are many reasons for such discriminations such as parents provide less education to girls than to boys thinking that girls' major responsibility is to look after household rather than going to school. A study (Tuladhar, 2007) shows that 29% of parents still feel that girls are valuable for household work so education for girls is not considered as a good investment. The same study shows that in the case of education for boys, 100% parents are affirmative that a boy should go to school.

Because of multiple responsibilities at home and also in society, girls' educational performance seemed lower than that of boys and at the same time class repetition and dropout rate remained for girls. My findings reveal somewhat similar issues. Table 2 displays the major reasons for dropout by girls. Some reasons were heavy work load at home such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of animals, fetching water, washing clothes and sometimes working as wage labour (*Melapat*). Due to such workload girls seldom have time to be punctual in class. Hence, due to lack of concentration on studies girls were found to be repeating classes. Such practices demotivated girls to even join or attend schools. Adding to the de motivational factor are the parents not interested in giving priority to education for girls. As one dropout girl said '*If I don't work at home my parents get angry with me*'. This shows that girls are habitual and happy to do other work rather than study. The reasons of dropout for boys vary from that of girls.



Through the interview with dropout boys and their parents it was learnt that the main reason for their dropping out of school was to follow their fathers' occupation to earn money. Majority of households were involved in their traditional caste-based occupation (Sarki- leather work/shoes making). During school holiday, fathers would take their sons to their workplace and coach them to do the work. As an incentive, they would give their sons some money. Boys remained happy with the incentives and were rather motivated to work by adopting the family occupation rather than going to school or college for study. On the other hand, it was noticed that parents felt relieved by getting help from their sons to sustain daily lives even though they had positive thoughts regarding their children's education. Similarly, some other reasons for boys' dropping out from school are low concentration on study, poor economic status and peer pressure.

Educational attainment is defined as the highest grade completed within the most advanced level attended in the educational system of the country. In Nepal, the enrollment rate in primary education has been increasing but still there is problem with the children completing their studies. School feeding programs have been proven to encourage families to send their girl children to school and improve school completion rates (UNFPA, 2009). Contrary to the above scenario, my study site had still very low educational attainment. Very few have completed higher secondary or higher degree.

Despite expansion of educational facilities and the emphasis on free primary education in Nepal only half of the children complete fifth grade. The above literature was related to the reality of the study site to some extent. The educational attainment of people in study site was very low especially in higher grades. Though parents gave more priority to boys' education, the educational attainment of boys was also not satisfactory. For illustration, only one person (male) among 62 households was pursuing Master's degree in the study site.

### **Gender relation between girls and boys**

"Gender relations refers to the relations of power between women and men which is revealed in a range of practices, ideas and representations including division of labor, roles and resources between women and men and in ascribing to them different attributes, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavioral patterns, and so on" (Agrawal, 1994, p 51). This relation has now been gradually changing for a number of reasons such as expanding educational opportunities, increasing influence of modernization, growing pluralistic ideas and so on. But still this problem has not come to the end. The

study shows that girls have been suffering under gender relations. For instance, parents have differential attitudes towards their son and daughters' education, they expect different things from their sons and daughters. The parents expect more from an educated son rather than an educated daughter.

This is because of the traditional patriarchal principles within the family embedded in culture and religion that gender identity and roles of daughters and sons have been shaped. So, power relations, women's subordinate role, preference for son; and patriarchal values and norms, and hierarchal structure of society in general are the major causes of biased behavior of parents towards their daughters and sons (Bajracharya, 2009). And this biased behavior of parents directly or indirectly affect girls' education.

Similarly, parents have bias towards girls and boys in providing facilities such as extra coaching and mentoring in the form of tuition. Separate study rooms are provided to boys but not for girls even though they (girls) demand for it. They are discriminated even in the matters of food and dishes. Boys are offered food early whereas girls have to eat later (together with their mother) only after having served their brothers. This entire scenario shows how our society is still rooted in favor of sons reflecting its patriarchal structure. Though many parents claim that sons and daughters are equal, this is actually difficult to find in practice.

Furthermore, parents expect differential things from their educated sons and daughters. As the parents stated during interviews that their expectation from their educated son was more and their mindset was that sons would help them in future by being a role model in society with a good job holding. Their views towards educated daughter were that she should be a good daughter, be self-reliant and free from household work and so on. Father of a girl said (Age 36) said,

We send our son to school so that he can be a good jobholder and help us in future and we send daughters to school for her happy life after marriage. If she is educated, we can find educated and good husband for her. Then, she can make her life joyful.

From this saying, I felt that they had been giving less priority to their daughters' education and directly connecting daughters' education with their marriage. A study done by Save the Children (2007) mentions that parents' less valuable attitude towards girls' education than boys'. I found the same situation in my study site. Home training for girls in domestic activities may be viewed by parents as better preparation for their adult marital roles. The training is typically received through the formal education system (Sathar &

Lloyd 1993 as cited in Stash & Hannum 2009). So, all these practices directly or indirectly hampered for girls' education.

As a mother (Age 32) said, *Chori ko jaatle jati padhe pani ke garnu ghar ko kam nagari sukha chaina*, meaning what can a daughter do? In spite of higher education, she has no choice but to do domestic chores.

The above statement clarifies that mothers view girls are fit for performing household jobs rather than pursuing study. From those experiences at the research field, I understood that parents had taken education for girls as less priority of their life. The first most priority for girls is to be perfect in all household works. Ultimately such thoughts and practices hamper girls' education.

*Learning Environment at Home for Girls' Education:* Appropriate environment such as special care and support in family is highly required to increase the educational performance of children. Though parents claimed that they were providing proper learning environment to their children, they were not getting (especially girls) proper environment for their study. Some girls of my study area used to take self-initiative for their education rather than parents do. Some girls used to earn money by themselves for their own study. Because the parents were not aware of their difficulties like what they want, what kinds of study materials they require, what have been their learning difficulties are, what the problems are associated with school/college fee and so on. A girl said,

I am studying in BBS 1<sup>st</sup> year, morning shift. In the morning (6:30 am) I go to college and from 11:00 to 6:00 pm I go to office. Sometimes, when I have time especially during Saturdays, I get involved in household work. The job hampered my studies because I could not give proper time for my study. But I am required to do this job to earn money for my study because my parents are not able to afford my study expenses.

Age 19, - BBS 1<sup>st</sup> year

Similarly, another girl shared the same situation of her home. As she said,

I am a commerce student in grade 11. My parents told me to study but they did not try to create the required study environment at home. When it was time to pay college fees they became angry and showed difficulties to provide the fees. My mother always goes to work in the morning. I have to finish the entire household work before and after college. My aim in future is to work in banking sector. But I fear that my aim will not come true. I studied up to SLC in Nepali medium but now my college teaches

us in English medium. So, it is difficult for me to understand few subjects while taught in English. I want to take extra tuition class for those subjects but because of poor economic condition of my parents they have suggested me to avoid extra class. In this regard I am also thinking to change my background from commerce to other faculty.

Age 18, class- 11

An aforesaid fact gives a clear evidence of girls' difficulties at home. Although girls go to school/college, they do not get appropriate learning environment at home and nor do they get sufficient time for study. It also indicates that parents are not concerned about girls' education and concerned about their needs at home. But in the case of boys, the study found very few boys earning money from wage earning and teaching for their education. Parents themselves had taken initiative for their sons' education and encouraged them to give more time for their studies rather than household work. Boys were supported when they had to take extra tuition/coaching class, sending to urban areas school/college. During the interview none except one boy named Shyam said that household work and parents' behavior were barriers for his study. This is because of poor economic condition of parents.

Poor economic status of family is also a barrier that hampers girls' education. Some families in the study site having good economic status were found showing equitable behavior between their sons and daughters. For instance, parents send their son and daughter to same schools; provide equal facilities to both son and daughter. But here I want to relate an argument and logic given by De Haan (2007), Kabeer, (2000); Percy-Smith, (2000) and Silver (1994, 2007) as cited in Khadka (2009) says that social exclusion takes place more than poverty. They argue that exclusion goes beyond the distribution of resources to individuals or households in deed; they maintain the imperative viewing exclusion/inclusion 'from social justice', 'relational', and 'rights' point of view. In another way Rawls (1971) views that economic barriers are some of the main sources of social injustice. Here the situation of my study site was more associated with Rawl's view. Some families in the study site having good economic status were found showing equitable behavior between their sons and daughters. For instance, sending their sons and daughters in high level private school; providing equal facilities; proper encouragement for study to both sons and daughter were some of the equitable practices. Here a girl aged 14 said,

My brother and I are studying in the same school. We are getting equal facilities at our home and our parents always encourage us to study.

The above saying of girl shows economic status of family has an effect on gender patterns of behavior towards their son and daughter. In addition, those girls having equal facilities were found with good educational performance and also very less chance for class repetition and dropout. On the contrary, the family with poor or medium economic status was found giving unequal treatment to their sons and daughters while providing education. In this regard a girl aged 23 said,

I studied in government school and my brother studied in private school up to SLC. Now he is studying B.Sc. 1<sup>st</sup> year. My parents encouraged him to study without any disturbance but they suggested me that I should work while studying. Now I am studying M.A 1<sup>st</sup> year and also teaching at a private school to cover my study expenses. Because of my job I could not attend my class so I have only enrolled at University. I am planning to attend my exam without attending classes and prepare by self study. Together with my job and study I am also involved in household work. So, all these regular activities are creating difficulty in my study.

In the above statement it can be noted that unequal gender patterns of behavior at home creates difficulties in girls' study. The responsibilities of girls at home and parents' expectation from their educated sons and daughter indicate that parents have been suffering from such type of gender ideology that makes different status between sons and daughters. So, following Silver's (2007) view that parents exclude girl child through the gender ideology and belief, similar view operates as an institution. Such gender based home institution is very much related to institution and relational exclusion/inclusion, i.e. parents use gender norm and practices to exclude their daughter for providing education.

Beside this, everyday activities also affect girls' education to some extent. Everyday activities involve those entire activities people do while they wake up in the morning till they go to bed at night (Bajracharya, 2009). During the interview and focused group discussion with girls and boys (14 interviews and 7 FGD) I requested them to tell me about their daily schedule in detail. The purpose of this schedule was to understand the details about the daily activities of girls in their home, forms of discrimination practiced against them, their educational activities and time availability for it and how they are feeling towards those activities.

The study found that the daily work schedule such as their waking up time, and their routine from morning till night differed between girls and boys.

This helped to identify differential gender roles performed within the household. The table 3 below presents girls involvement in household work in comparison to their boy counterparts. Though it differs from an individual to individual, this summary table has been generated based on group discussions.

**Table 3: Daily Work Schedule for Girls and Boys**

| Time           | Activities for girls                                         | Activities for boys                                    |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 6:30am         | Wake up, clean up and do house hold chores                   | Wake up, clean up                                      |
| 7:00am         | Serve and have tea                                           | Have tea and study                                     |
| 8:00am         | Cook rice                                                    | Do study                                               |
| 8:30am-9:00am  | Have food and be ready for school                            | Have food and be ready for school                      |
| 9:30am         | Go to school                                                 | Go to school                                           |
| 4:00pm         | Come back home from school and have snacks                   | Come back home from school and have snacks             |
| 4:30- 6:00 pm  | Bring drinking water from tap, and do other household chores | Sometimes bring drinking water from tap and go to play |
| 6:00 – 8:00 pm | Do homework                                                  | Do homework                                            |
| 8:00 pm        | Have dinner                                                  | Have dinner                                            |
| 8:00 – 9:30    | After helping mother in the kitchen study and watch TV       | Study and watch TV                                     |
| 9:30 -10:00pm  | Go to bed                                                    | Go to bed                                              |
| Working Hours  | 4 hours                                                      | 1 hour                                                 |
| Study Hours    | 2 hours                                                      | 5 hours                                                |

Source: Field study 2011

From the above-mentioned daily schedule in table 1, it can be understood that gendered role was dominant in everyday life of the girls. It shows differential roles and responsibilities assigned by parents to son and daughter that indicate different patterns of everyday life of girls and boys. Girls in almost all surveyed households were not free from usual household work. Though

girls did not have desires to be involved in household work, they were forced to do by their parents. Therefore, girls were taking it as their regular duty at their home as a responsible daughter. In this regard, a girl said,

I am involved in all household chores e.g. cooking, cleaning, working in field, taking care of animals, collecting wood etc. I always have had to do all household work even during exams. My parents will not be happy with me if I do not do all those works. So, definitely these works hamper my studies but what can I do? As a girl child I have to do all those works to help my parents. And my parents also expect the same type of job from me.

Age 22, class 12

It is clear that girls get less time for study. They are required for almost all household chores but they do such activities or accept things without any hesitation or questioning. It has been naturalized in their life. These activities at home shape girls' routines, norms, and rules apart from the school's expectation. So, looking into everyday life of girls and boys at home provided bright instances of different forms of discrimination practiced against girls and ultimately it hampers towards girls' education.

#### **Girls' Difficulty for their Education from Discriminatory Patterns of Behavior at Home**

Gender discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of an individual based on a gender stereotype (often referred to as sexism or sexual discrimination) (ICIMOD, 1997). Different patterns of parents' behavior, different in thoughts towards their sons and daughters have indicated that parents have been discriminating between their girl and boy children in the study sites. There was differential treatment made for girls and boys and that treatment hampered girls' education. Some parents made clear discrimination by sending their girls to public schools and boys to private schools. Here's a quote from a girl (age 19, grade 10) also says, "*We are two sisters and one brother. I and my younger sister go to government school and my brother goes to private school*". This situation was found to be more in those households which have poor and medium economic status. While looking from gender perspective, the girl child is the first victim of being sent to public school and getting other facilities if parents are not able to afford educational expenses. In contrast, almost all household who have higher economic status were found in providing equal facilities to both son and daughter in terms of schooling and other facilities. This is also true to Dalit

households who have better economic condition. Here I found the same statement given by Agarwal (1994, p. 5) "the impact of gender ideologies can vary by a household property status".

Moreover, girls were highly involved in household chores whereas boys were free from that. Intentionally parents encouraged girls to perform all the household work. This is because of the traditional perception that parents think that after marriage girls are required to do household works at their in-laws' house. So, to be perfect daughter in-laws after their marriage they have to learn all household works along with their study.

It seems that parents give more emphasis to girls to be perfect in household works rather than to study. Hence, a proper learning environment is not created for girl children. Furthermore parents' concern and expectation from their son and daughters' education also give a scenario of gender discrimination in providing education. Different study reports show that the gender parity in school education has significantly improved. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in NER at primary, lower secondary, basic, secondary, higher secondary and secondary levels are 0.99; 0.99; 0.99; 0.99; 1.03 and 0.99 respectively (DoE, 2068). So, based on these data we can say that today more girls have access to schooling. But still they have to fulfill the responsibility at home, which hampers their study (Thapa, 2007). As a dropout girl aged 20 said,

As a daughter of my house, I have had to do all household work like cooking, cleaning, taking care of animals, cutting grass regularly and sometimes go to earn (Melapat). In this way I am engaged in household work rather than study. I failed two times in class 10 and then I left my school because I hesitated to study in the same grade repeatedly. My parents just told me go to school but they did not force me. Now I am just doing household work. Sometimes I reflect on my school days and feel that if I join school again, I can study. But I cannot share these feelings with my parents. Because I dropped out myself and if I share my interest with parents, they will definitely be angry with me.

The above scenario of girls' involvement at their house can be understood that parents encouraged girls to perform household jobs and relieve boys of such works. Hence, it shows different roles and responsibilities of girls and boys in the form of institutional and relational basis of exclusion and inclusion (Silver, 2007).



### **Internalization and Acceptance of gender discriminatory norms and behavior**

The study reveals that there is unequal gender relation in response to providing education. Regarding this unequal gender relation almost all girls felt such unequal treatment from their parents. But they were silently accepting this discriminatory behavior and thinking it as a natural and cultural process. They have been taking such practice as normal and accepting it for being a good daughter in her family. During the interview a girl (Age 17) said,

My younger brother and I were studying together in the same level but my brother was never involved in any household work. As a boy child he hesitated to do household work and my parents also did not encourage him for that work.

The above statement also indicates that they (girls) are supporting the practice and behavior by talking it as a natural process. This also indicates that girls have been influencing those social and cultural patriarchal norms where boys are in higher position than girls. During the interview, I asked a young girl (Age 17), studying in grade 10, why she and her sister went to government school while their brother to private school she said,

We are three sisters and one brother. My parents say they cannot afford to private school for all of us. So we all sisters go to government school and our brother goes to private school. But we never complain to our parents in this regard.

The field study (open interview, group discussion) indicates that they (girls) are supporting the practice and behavior by taking it as a natural process. This also indicates that girls have been influencing those social and cultural patriarchal norms where boys are in higher position than girls. So, the above situation reveals discriminatory patterns of behavior that have been seen and it is taken as quite normal without any complaint by girls.

### **Discussion with Findings**

I have discussed the study findings by applying gender analysis (GRF and SRF). I also reflected my conceptual framework and tried to examine my field findings. The study found gender discrimination still in practice in the study site. This discriminatory practice was influenced by social, cultural norms, value and belief system (Bajrachaya, 2009). Such norms, values and beliefs can also be interpreted using the Social Relations Approach. For exploring discrimination as such inequality, as Kabeer (2000) puts the actual

rules and practices of institutions need to be scrutinized in order to know their values and assumptions. She further states that rules, resources, people, activities and powers are the dimensions that are significant in the analysis of social inequality.

As suggested by Kabeer (2000), social relations approach uses the term 'social relations' as a structural relationship that creates and reproduces systematic differences in the positioning of different groups of people. Such relations determine our identities, our roles and responsibilities and the claims that we can make. My study finding also confirms this, indicating different roles of daughter in household chores

Furthermore, girls had inherent characteristic such as being honest, responsible and caring by nature who would take discrimination as a natural process. The working nature of girls connected them with the family and society whereas boys remained discrete (*Connected vs. Discrete*). Because of this situation at home and society boys were not found to be responsible for their family and societies as the girls were.

Kabeer (2000) outlines the significance of institutional analysis in identifying inequalities produced by such discriminatory social relations. She identifies state, market, community and family/kinship as the key institutional locations (March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 2000). According to her, institutions produce, reinforce and reproduce social relations, thereby creating and perpetuating social difference and inequality. In this context household and family are forms of institution that produce and reinforce gender -based inequalities through the resource allocation, assigning roles within and outside the household.

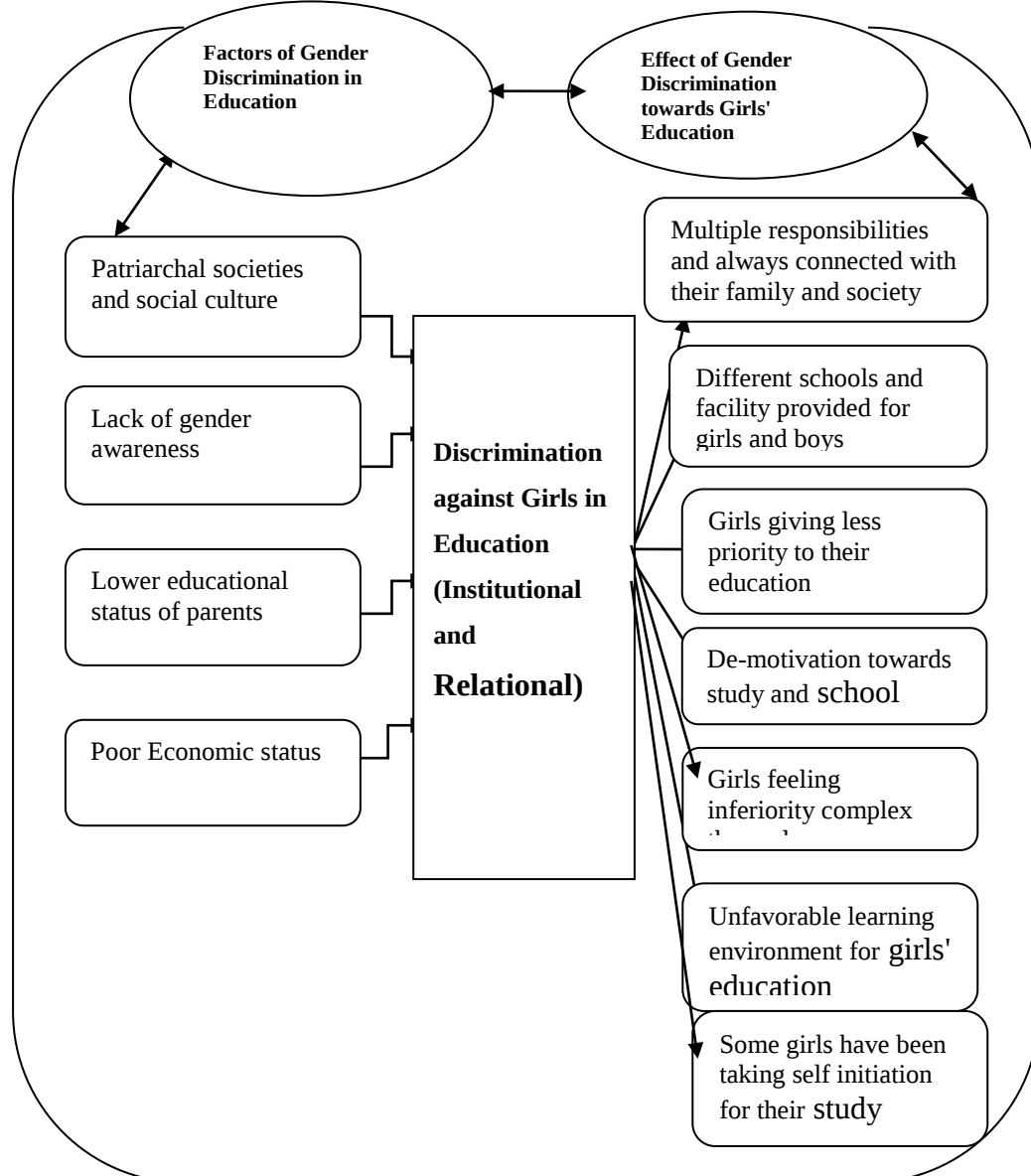
This means distinguishing each of the roles and responsibilities seems unofficial but is expressed through norms, values, laws, traditions and customs (Leach, 2003). Parents' attitudes and behaviors are guided by social norms and customs and they determine the roles that girls/women and boys/men play in the family and community (UNESCO, 2004).

It can be noted from the above situation that parents need to give special priority to the girls' education. Their saying, "we are giving equal treatment to sons and daughter" is not enough for girls' empowerment. The reason is that girls have special needs to attain education. Here I want to relate a principle of *equity vs. equality*. According to this principle, equal treatment to son and daughter in unequal situation again produces inequality. Therefore, equitable treatments for girls' needs are required to ensure gender equality.

Many authors Moser, (1993) & Taylor, (1999) as cited in (Fonjong & Athanasia, 2007) have recognized mainly two needs namely strategic and

practical gender. Those needs are practical (immediate or short term) and strategic needs (long terms) relating to the above cases. Girls require incentive (material like scholarship) to continue their study in a short term basis and affirmative action is required to address the aforesaid gender inequality in education. Once such special treatment (e.g. affirmative action) is in place, it can address those needs and accordingly shape family (as an institution) for correcting parents' behavior and gender relation within households. The chart presented below captures the overall process of discrimination against girls and its impact on girls' education

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of study findings.



***Study Findings and Conclusion***

The major findings of my study undertaken in Dhapakhel VDC of Lalitpur are summarized below as specific to research themes

**Table 4. Findings and Conclusions of the study**

| <b>Research Themes</b>          | <b>Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Conclusions</b>                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Forms of discrimination at home | Providing different roles and responsibilities to girls and boys; differential expectation, value and importance towards sons and daughters.                                                         | Structural relationship and such relations determine the identity, roles and responsibilities (Institutional and Relational).                                      |
| Rationale behind discrimination | Parents discriminate between their daughter and sons through imbalanced treatment                                                                                                                    | Lack of gender awareness; societal norms and patriarchal beliefs system; poor economic condition influence gender relations, roles and attitudes within household. |
| Impact of gender discrimination | Multiple responsibilities and always connected with their family and society (connected vs. discrete); girls giving less priority to their education; de-motivation towards study and school dropout | Girls feeling inferiority complex themselves. Some girls have been taking self initiation for their study rather than parents.                                     |

Furthermore, there are multiple dimensions of social relations such as gender, caste and economic condition and these are found to affect girls' education. Households with poor socio-economic condition and from Dalit caste have higher possibility to have lower education and girl children of those households are the victim of lower performance and drop out from schools. As observed in empirical evidence, gender and economic conditions are found be associated more than gender and caste in accessing education in studied sites. It means that caste and gender have lesser influence in access to education. Nevertheless, there are different degree of association among

gender, caste and economic condition. Hence, it shows that there is the complexity of relationship among gender, caste and economic condition in terms of access to education.

From above table, some concluding remarks can be drawn:

Though gender relations are changing along positive lines, particularly in relation to education, knowingly and unknowingly they are discriminating between their son and daughter. These types of discriminatory behaviors, attitudes and practices of parents are the reflections of socially and culturally detained patriarchal norms. Although such norms are not officially declared, they have been deeply rooted in the society as customs and become a matter of everyday act. Accordingly, those social norms, values and practice make girls always connected with their family or in the society. They also feel this institutionalized discrimination as natural and inevitable; and accept and comply with norms and value happily. In contrast, boys do not show such attitudes but exhibit different behaviour without understanding household situation.

Such practices result in constraints in regard to access and continued participation of girls in education. It is not only because of patriarchal beliefs and differential treatment between girls and boys. It is also due to differential economic condition. It means that gender and economic system operate together. Furthermore, caste system is also an important structural and institutional factor which is responsible for low educational status of parents. And they (parents) do not influence and motivate for children's education, especially girls. Therefore, girls' educational performance and status do not grow along positive lines. Similarly, girls' dropping out from school seemed to continue and overall educational status of people at the study site also seemed low. In short, gender relations within the household reflect wider society's norms, value and practices that restrict girls' education in one way or other.

### Notes

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2. Ropani is locally adopted land measurement unit and it is widely practiced in Kathmandu valley and hilly area of Nepal. One ropani is equivalent to 0.05 hectare or 500 square meters.

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